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SIX SECONDS OF DARKNESS

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BY
OCTAVUS ROY COHEN



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**TO MY FRIEND
ROBERT H. DAVIS**

SIX SECONDS OF DARKNESS



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CHAPTER I

THE old-timer at the telephone board made a casual entry on the report sheet spread before him, relighted his offensively fragrant pipe, and swung his swivel chair around idly.

“That was O’Rafferty on nine,” he reported. “All’s quiet.”

Desk Sergeant Larry O’Brien grinned cheerfully through the haze of rancid smoke.

“As I was afther sayin’,” he remarked, “ye cannot always sometimes tell. ’Tis these clear and aisy nights which beget action for us poor coppers. Ye wouldn’t be afther thinkin’ by the quietude which has gripped us hereabouts these past sivin

days that there's a bombshell sizzlin' under headquarters waitin' to be busted."

The other answered sagely:

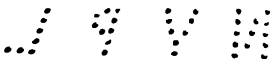
"That all depends on how much you've been talking to reporters, Larry. They've been asking so many questions and taking so many notes that I'm afraid to say me name's Farris. They're wise that something's up."

"Bad cess to 'em—the whole beloved lot. There's Stinson of the *News*—him that's so thin he could sit on a dime an' ye'd shtill be able to read 'In God We Trust'—he wanted to know was *I* in on the graft?"

"And you told him——"

"I'm afther givin' nothin' away, me bhye. I merely raymarked that I'm no special pals with Barret Rollins, an' that Police Commissioner Clement Hall ap'nted me personally."

Farris lowered his voice discreetly and hitched his chair confidentially closer.



"They're wise, ain't they? The whole crowd?"

"To pwhat?"

"That Rollins is in the middle of the fireworks? That Hamilton's been trying to get him ever since Hall became interested in this Civic Reform League? I don't see," he complained, "why they always start in on the police when they decide a city needs cleanin' up?"

"Logic, most likely. And as for Robbins, he don't be afther lovin' Commissioner Hall nor Mister Edward J. Hamilton anny more than they're lovin' him; which is considerable less than none at all. An' he's a good detective, too; he's keen, an' he's got a good head on a pair of hefty shoulders. But, Al, me bbye, Oi'm thinkin' Oi'd rather be a disk sergeant right this minute than Mister Barret Rollins, chief av detectives. An'—well, speakin' av angels—or divils——"

The street door swung back and a man

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of medium height briefly acknowledged the salute of the gray-haired doorman. The newcomer swung across to the desk and nodded a curt greeting.

“O’Brien,” he said, “how goes it?”

“So-so, chief. How’s the bhye?”

“Well enough. Anything new to-night?”

“Everything’s dead. Nothing stirring anywhere except a stiff was drug out av the river an’ carried to Carson’s undertaking joint. What’s new with you?”

“Nothing, nothing at all. I’ll be going into the office yonder for a smoke and a bit of a snooze. If you want me——” He waved his hand airily.

O’Brien’s eyes followed the man with interest as he walked across the room toward the little door which opened into his private office. Barrett Rollins radiated strength and physical ability in every well-knit line of his stocky figure. His unusual breadth and depth of chest conveyed

an impression of lack of height to which a tape measure easily gave the lie. Nor was his face that of the average plain-clothes man; the eyes were a bit too close set, perhaps, but they were level eyes—eyes blessed with the rare faculty of penetration. The brain behind those eyes was alert and ruthless.

He had worked himself to his present position as chief of the plain-clothes force by dint of sheer ability. A little political pull may have helped here and there, but that assistance had been inconsiderable. He was an efficient man, greatest testimony to which was given by the unanimous praise of his worst enemies—who, by the way, numbered legion. He was a martinet; unbending, inexorable, heartless. His third degree was a classic.

Larry O'Brien chuckled softly as he chewed the stub of a dilapidated cigar.

"And to think of *him*," he remarked, "bein' squeezed between th' thumb an'

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forefinger of a little, undersized runt of a reformer like Edward Hamilton. Hamilton's said he's ready to turn things loose an' tear 'em up, an' he never makes a statement unless——”

The telephone on his desk jangled sharply. Farris groaned audibly as he lifted himself from the depths of his swivel chair and the sergeant motioned him back to rest.

“Oi'll be afther answerin' it mesilf,” he said, and then, lifting the receiver: “P'lice headquarters.”

From the other end of the wire came the curt, incisive tones of Police Commissioner Clement Hall, the real czar of the department under the city's new form of government.

“Sergeant O'Brien?”

“Yis, sor. Misther Hall, isn't it?”

“Yes. Is Rollins there?”

“Yis, sor.”

“Tell him to take two of his best men,

Hawkins and Cartwright, if they're there, and hustle to the home of Edward J. Hamilton in Chief Rariden's automobile."

"The chief's auto ain't here, sor."

"A taxicab, then," came the impatient snap. "Hurry! That's the thing I'm after."

"And whin they get there, sor?"

The commissioner's usually placid voice quivered with excitement:

"Hamilton has been murdered!"

"*Pwhatt?* Edward Hamilton?"

"Yes. Tell Rollins to drop everything else and stick on that case until he gets the man. Tell him I know nothing about it except that Mrs. Faber, Hamilton's housekeeper, just telephoned me that Hamilton had been shot. I'm coming right down to headquarters. Tell Rollins to keep in touch with me. I want speed; understand? And I want him to catch the man who did it!"

The receiver clicked on the hook, and

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Sergeant Larry O'Brien dazedly followed suit at his end. Farris had risen and was standing at the sergeant's elbow, his old eyes on fire with excitement.

"What's that, O'Brien—what's that?"

"There's hell broke loose!" came back the sharp answer. "Orderly!"

The young policeman on duty answered the call immediately. He had heard just enough of the conversation to comprehend its import.

"Yes, sir?"

"Call Chief Rollins—quick!" Then, turning back to Farris: "Hamilton killed! Holy, sufferin' mackerel!"

Rollins came out of his private office on the jump. His little eyes were blazing, and his manner radiated the competence which had carried him to his present position of eminence on the police force.

"What's this? Hamilton killed?"

"Deader'n a doornail!" snapped

O'Brien. "Hall wants you to take Hawkins and Cartwright and stick around there until you get the guy. Didn't tell me anything. Says the housekeeper telephoned him. He's coming down here, and is afther wantin' you to keep in touch with us. He's liable to stop in there, so ye'd better hurry."

"I'll hurry. Orderly! Hike upstairs and tell Cartwright and Hawkins to come running." He viciously bit off the end of a black cigar. "Good Lord! Hamilton killed!"

In an unbelievably short time the two plain-clothes officers presented themselves at the desk. Rollins briefly ordered them to follow. The faces of the three men detailed to the case were studies in concentration and bewilderment. Nor could they conceal the excitement which gripped them. That Edward Hamilton of all men should have been murdered at this

particular time; Edward Hamilton, civic reformer, broker, social leader! And evidently in his own home!

Even before the door had closed behind them policemen appeared from the dormitories upstairs in various stages of disarray, begging for news. To all of them O'Brien made the same answer. He knew nothing except that Hamilton had been murdered. How or why or when he did not know. As to the place of the crime, he judged it had been at Hamilton's home. Policemen gathered in knots and discussed the case excitedly, robbing themselves of well-earned sleep that they might miss no detail of the case as it was telephoned in. One by one they went up-stairs to make themselves presentable, only to return and lounge about the grim room, speculating on the whys and wherefores.

Edward J. Hamilton occupied a unique position in the city's life. A bachelor at forty, his household had no other members

except his ward, a girl of about nineteen years of age, and one of the city's most popular débutantes, and a Mrs. Faber, who for many years had held the position of house-keeper.

Years before he had retired from the active business life of the city, although his retirement had been more a figure of speech than an actual fact. He was financially interested in most of the city's largest enterprises; he was on the directorates of the First National Bank and of a large lumber corporation. He was socially in demand—a thorough cosmopolite, a polished gentleman, a patron of the arts; a man known for his gentleness of disposition, his loveliness of character, his unflinching devotion to duty, and, above all, for his fearlessness.

Of enemies he had many; no man of decided character is ever entirely free from enemies, but they respected him. During recent years public office had been thrust

at him, and he had steadfastly declined. But lately he had forged to the front of the stage with the organization of the Civic Reform League—a body of leading citizens who recognized the rottenness in Denmark and had decided to weed their municipal garden. It was at head of such a body of men that one who knew Hamilton would expect to find him. And there he was!

His murder, coming at this time, was nothing less than sensational. No single event could have so shaken the city. The veriest novice of the police force felt himself on his toes, for it was public knowledge that the force had been slated to receive the first broadside from the guns of the Civic Reform League, captained by the dead man. It was up to the department to make good, to do its bit to neutralize the sentiment against it by prompt and efficient action in discovering and apprehending the culprit.

The clock over the sergeant's desk slowly struck ten, and with the striking came the first of the calls from the policemen on the various beats about the city, giving their hourly report. At five minutes past ten a handsome limousine whirred up to the door of police headquarters. It jerked to a protesting stop with a loud screeching of brakes. Immediately the officers about the walls rose to their feet and massed together, staring toward the door.

In the stark glare of the single carbon lamp which glowed in the doorway, the figure of a woman appeared. She jumped from the driver's seat of the big car, gathered her skirts about her, and half walked, half ran, across the sidewalk and into the police station.

She entered the room and paused in uncertainty. Larry O'Brien, rising to his feet, appraised her swiftly with his keen Irish eyes.

He saw a girl of about nineteen years of age, a girl with rose-red cheeks and now-pallid lips, flashing black eyes and raven hair. She was of medium height, slender, and, even in the tempest of emotion by which she was plainly gripped, wonderfully graceful. Her bosom rose and fell unevenly; the folds of her wrap fell back, disclosing a costly evening dress. The young policeman in the corner who had patrolled the beat on which the murder had that night occurred stifled an exclamation of surprise, but did not succeed in holding back the girl's name:

"Miss Duval!"

A gasp went up from the policemen. They surged closer to the desk. Sergeant O'Brien rasped them back and bowed to the girl:

"Yes, miss?"

She stared about her in bewilderment.

"This—this is police headquarters?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I want to see the chief."

"I'm sorry, miss, he isn't here."

It was plain that she was on the verge of hysteria. With a filmy bit of lacy handkerchief she dashed the tears from her eyes.

"I must see him, I tell you! I am Eunice Duval, Mr. Hamilton's ward. Mr. Hamilton has just been—been—killed!"

O'Brien lowered his voice, trying futilely to quiet her agitation:

"Yes, ma'am; we've just heard it. Don't you worry none, ma'am, we've got our best men out on the case, an' we'll catch the man that did it. Bad cess to th' spalpeen."

The girl stopped short and stared at him. Then she broke into a laugh; a laugh which was not good to hear—a loud laugh, gratingly harsh.

"*You'll* catch the one who did it? Who—who? You?"

O'Brien was nonplussed and not a little embarrassed. A woman in hysterics!

“Keep a holt on yersilf, ma’am. I’m Sergint O’Brien—Larry O’Brien, at yer service, ma’am. If ye’ll have a chair I’ll——”

She stared at him as though transfixed. Then her hands went to her bosom, and she threw back her head once more. Peal after peal of laughter rang out; the laughter of uncontrolled hysteria. Larry O’Brien, mumbling to the saints for help, deserted his post at the desk and rounded the railing to her side. One of the patrolmen—a man of family—diagnosed the case and sent out a hurry call for a flask of whisky.

“Take it aisy, now, ma’am,” soothed O’Brien. “’Tis a terrible thing, to be sure, but we’ll catch the guy.”

The laughter stopped as abruptly and as eerily as it had started. For a minute the girl tried to speak—but the words seemed to choke her.

“You—you can call back the men you—you sent on the case,” she said.

“Call them back? Ye’re not falin’ well, miss.”

“No. Can’t you understand what I came here for? I came here to give myself up! *I killed Mr. Hamilton!*”

CHAPTER II

A POLICEMAN in the crowd said "Oh!" very suddenly, and another one broke in with a hoarse "Shut up!" Farris, the old-timer, mechanically took down the report of the patrolman on beat sixteen. The orderly produced a chair as though by magic, and into it Eunice Duval sank gratefully.

Not even the sensational news of Hamilton's death had created the stir in the minds of the policemen which was begotten by the confession of the girl that she was guilty of the crime. It was Larry O'Brien who first regained a semblance of his poise, and he forced a light laugh to his lips.

"Av course," he said in what he fondly believed to be a calm and matter-of-fact

tone, "that's different. There bein' extenuatin' circumstances——"

The girl looked up quickly.

"There—there weren't," she said simply. "I—I just shot him."

"Ah, g'wan wid yez! He was thryin' to attack ye——" O'Brien was talking more to soothe her than to arrive at any definite conclusion, but she had grown suddenly calmer.

"No, he wasn't attacking—me. I—well, I've told you. I shot him, and—I've given myself up."

"But surely——"

"I'm afraid I don't want to say anything else right now. I believe there's no bail in mur—in such cases as this—and I'd rather you put me—wherever you're going to put me. I'm very tired."

Larry scratched his head in bewilderment.

"If it was silf-definse, now——"

"I'm afraid it wasn't. And I'd prefer not to say anything else."

"If there's something we can be afther doin'—"

Another car whirred to a stop outside, and a slender man, clean-shaven and rather boyish of appearance, entered the hall. There was something aggressive in his calm blue eyes and in the carriage of his small, well-set frame. Some of the policemen, seeing him, jerked to attention and touched their hands to the visors of their caps. But O'Brien was too dazed even for that.

"Good avenin', sor!" was his greeting.

Police Commissioner Clement Hall looked up sharply. Then his eyes lighted on the pitiful figure of the girl in evening dress. Instantly his frigidity of manner dropped, and he took her hand in both of his.

"Eunice! You've given us a frightful scare. I stopped at the house, and

they told me that you had gone somewhere in the car."

"Yes; I came here to tell——"

"They knew about it, my girl. Mrs. Faber telephoned me, and I got in touch with them. We'll go back——"

"No—I'm going to stay."

"No, you'd better come back; or, if you don't want to return to the house, you can come with me. Mrs. Hall will look after you for a few days."

"You don't understand," she explained slowly. "I'm a prisoner."

"A prisoner?" Hall forced a smile to his lips. "I'm afraid the—er—a tragedy has worked on your nerves."

"My nerves are—very good. You see, I—I——" She was shaken with a sudden paroxysm of sobs, and the police commissioner turned dazedly to Larry O'Brien.

"What is she talking about?"

"That I dunno, sor, excipt that she came in here a bit agone all shook up like ye see

her now, sor, and says that she killed Mr. Hamilton!"

"What? Good God!" Hall stared in amazement, and then voiced the thought that was uppermost in the minds of each: "It's ridiculous!"

"I said as much, sor; but she says she shot him——"

"I shot him," said Eunice dully. "Just a little while ago. I came right down in the car to give myself up."

"Here!" Hall placed his hands paternally on her shoulders. "You are un-nerved, and I'm afraid—not quite yourself. You know that you didn't shoot Mr. Hamilton."

Again she was calm, although her body was still wracked by an occasional sob.

"You mean that you think I did not—even after I say that I did? That is very foolish, Mr. Hall. I shot Mr. Hamilton."

"Come home with me——"

"Won't you understand? They are to

hold me here. They can't let me go. There's no bail in such cases as this. I admit that I am unstrung, but I haven't lost my senses. I shot Mr. Hamilton less than an hour ago. You can tell the detectives to come back. I—I—shot him—in the dark!"

"In the dark?"

She passed a tired hand across her forehead.

"The lights went out—for about six seconds. But I'd rather not discuss it now. I wish you'd call Mr. Denson. He is my lawyer as well as Mr. Hamilton's. I'd rather tell him about it. I have a very bad headache."

Hall stared at her, pop-eyed.

"O'Brien," he snapped, "telephone Samuel R. Denson to come here immediately. Say Miss Duval is here and wants to see him. At once, you understand. And now, Eunice, let me beg you to be careful of your words. I am sure that

there is some dreadful mistake. You couldn't have killed Mr. Hamilton——”

“I did,” she repeated monotonously. “I killed him. I'd rather not talk about it now. I'm very tired. Won't you ask them to put me somewhere—by myself? Please—you don't understand—and I'd rather not discuss it now.”

“Very well; I'll take you to the chief's office and try to make you comfortable. I am sure that there is a mistake somewhere. You had no motive.”

“Yes, I had a motive.”

“And it was?” eagerly.

“I'd rather not talk about it now, if you please. Won't you take me to that—that—room?”

He offered her his arm in his most courtly fashion, and together they crossed to the door of the chief's office. Once in there, she sank down on the couch.

“Now please go, Mr. Hall.”

“But, Eunice——”

“Go—please. I’d rather be alone.”

“You must tell me.”

“I will tell no one anything. Just let me know when Mr. Denson comes. I’ve said all I care to say—now.”

Hall shook his head.

“I—I—am all up in the air. I’ll wait here at the station, of course. If you need me or want me, you can press that button. And when Mr. Denson comes I’ll send him in.”

“Thank you,” she answered in a tired little voice. “There’s nothing you can do—really. Perhaps they might let Mrs. Faber stay here with me. If you’ll just send her down——”

“I’ll be waiting here, and of course she can come.”

“I wish you wouldn’t see me any more tonight, Mr. Hall. I appreciate your—your—kindness, but really I’d rather not.

Oh, you *must* understand that I'd rather not be bothered! It was all so quick and so—so—horrible! Go, please."

The police commissioner made his way into the main room slowly. He was frowning with bewilderment. The thing was beyond his powers of comprehension. He could not understand the girl. Undoubtedly she had shot Hamilton—her reiteration was too sincere. But how? Or why? Above all—*why?*

Hall had known Hamilton intimately for twenty years. He had known Eunice since her birth. He had watched her grow through a skinny-legged girlhood to a magnificent maturity. He had been present at the guardianship proceedings after the death of her parents, when, by the will of her father, Hamilton was made the girl's guardian and trustee of her considerable estate.

That she instinctively disliked Hamilton he had realized, but a mere dis-

like does not usually lead to tragedy. They had never gotten along well together—despite the fact that the dead man had been passionately fond of his young ward. As for her dislike for the man she had killed, that had dated back to childhood, and ripened with the passing of years. She had tolerated him because of her legal status in his household, but she made no secret of her aversion. And now—Why, the thing was inconceivable.

The group of thoroughly excited policemen divided into little knots as Hall appeared. Then one of them came forward and touched his cap.

“Mr. Carroll is here, sir. He says you telephoned him.”

“Yes. Show him into the office of the chief of detectives.”

Glad that he had something definite to do, Hall made his way to the room of the chief of detectives, after first instructing O'Brien to do nothing except by his orders.

Once in the room, he telephoned to Mrs. Faber, housekeeper for the dead man, and requested that she come to police headquarters at once. Then he waited for David Carroll. Clement Hall had great faith in Carroll, but he knew that the man faced a difficult assignment, an unusual task—that of plumbing the depths of the mad impulse which must have prompted Eunice Duval to the shooting of her guardian.

The door opened and Carroll entered, entered so silently that for a moment Hall was not fully conscious of his presence. The police commissioner laughed shortly.

“If I didn’t know you better, Carroll, I’d say that that was a pose of yours—that damnable pussy-footed way you have of getting about. I don’t wonder they call you Silent Carroll. Sit down.”

The detective obeyed. Slumped down in the easy-chair by the side of the chief’s desk, he looked anything other than a fa-

mous detective. His pink-cheeked, boyish face gave the lie to the actuality of his thirty-eight years, his narrow shoulders gave no hint of the wiry strength they possessed, his baby blue eyes were partly veiled by silky lashes. David Carroll would have passed for anything anywhere save a detective. He was immaculately dressed in the latest tight-fitting clothes, his shoes were narrow and pointed, he carried a light cane and wore his hair pompadoured.

Yet David Carroll was known in six States as one of the cleverest of private detectives. His inoffensive appearance, which had proved a handicap to confidence at the outset of his career, was not his greatest asset. He had a way of insinuating himself into one's consciousness without saying a word or making a physical motion. One could easily fancy him a college senior, or a cub of a lawyer; but a detective, never.

Immediately on hearing of Hamilton's murder, Hall had telephoned Carroll. The men had worked together in the past, and Carroll's assistance had been enlisted by the Civic Reform League during the past few months for the purpose of collecting data against certain members of the police force and the city-hall officials. For that reason, if for no other, the man was intensely unpopular at headquarters; yet he carried himself with an attitude of confidence which begot respect even where it inspired fear. Hall leaned forward and launched into his story; the news of Hamilton's killing, the telephoning to the police department, and the assignment of Rollins to cover the case; then the startling confession of Eunice Duval. Finally he finished.

"I had intended putting you in charge of the case over Rollins' head," he said, "but of course Miss Duval's confession alters matters. I'll have to engage you pri-

vately to collect evidence which will result in her acquittal at the inevitable trial. You have met her yourself, and you know it is absurd to think that she would have killed Hamilton without good and sufficient motive—though what that motive could have been, God only knows. The man was my friend, and, while he was the victim of a terrific temper and strong passions, he was a gentleman, and I cannot imagine him giving cause for such a thing—especially to Eunice Duval.”

Carroll was not given to prodigality of words. His questions came slowly, drawlingly:

“Why ‘especially Eunice Duval’?”

“Because——” Hall flushed. “The man was a bachelor, you know. And I fancy that he was very much in love with Eunice. Her father had been his best friend—it had been one of those rare friendships which did not founder when both men fell in love with the same

woman. Duval won her, and it seemed that the affair cemented their affection. Eunice is a replica of her mother, but Hamilton, poor fellow, never felt toward her as a father toward a daughter, although he tried to make her think so. It is another case of—well—he fell in love with the reincarnation of the mother and his best friend.”

“She didn’t like him?”

“No. Instinct probably. She must have guessed that he loved her—as a lover loves, and not as a father. She barely tolerated him. He has spoken to me of the matter many times. It worried him. There was no outspoken dislike, but her attitude has always been such that he has been forced to remain constantly on his best behaviour in her presence. Can’t you understand the utter absurdity of her plea that she killed him? There is a mistake, there *must* be!”

“Hmm!” Carroll thrummed idly on

the arm of his chair. "I'd suggest that you put me in charge of the case."

"Over Rollins?"

"Over Rollins or not at all."

"But I'm more interested in freeing Miss Duval."

"You're convinced that the truth will clear her, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Then let me discover the truth."

"You have a theory?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to permit me to remain silent. I do not care to voice unsubstantiated opinions. I know nothing of the case."

"But surely you can tell me——"

"Nothing!"

The eyes of the two men met; Hall's black and penetrating, Carroll's boyishly blue and almost stony in their blankness. Hall shrugged resignedly.

“It’s a go. You’re in charge. I’ll notify the chief of police as soon as he gets back to the city—I’ve wired for him—and I’ll tell Barrett Rollins personally. Which reminds me that I’d better telephone him to come in. There’s no use to have him continue nosing about Hamilton’s home. The coroner’s probably there by this time, and I’d better go there myself. Mrs. Faber is leaving to come down here.”

Carroll rose languidly.

“Think I’ll go with you. You say Miss Duval doesn’t wish to make a statement now?”

“So she says. I’ve telephoned for Mr. Denson, her lawyer. Probably after she sees him she’ll be willing to give us details regarding the shooting. Until then—you know, old man, these things are the basis of your profession, but the thing has hit me all of a heap. And, funny as it sounds, I’m not nearly so shocked by the death of my friend as I am by the confession of his

ward. Of course you can't appreciate——"

"I believe I can," smiled Carroll. "I'm human, you see—quite human."

"Yes," slowly, "*sometimes* I believe you are. At other times I am not quite sure that you are not a fish."

The men walked into the main hall to receive the report of Sergeant Larry O'Brien that Mrs. Faber had arrived and had taken charge of Eunice in the private office of the chief. In response to Hall's query, via a patrolman, as to whether she cared to see him, Eunice sent word that she would have no statement to make until after she had seen Mr. Denson, except that she repeated the statement that she had killed Hamilton.

Hall shrugged and turned to Carroll.

"You see, she is very insistent."

"Yes," returned Carroll significantly, "very!"

"And now," continued the commis-

sioner, "to telephone Rollins. Hello! What's this?"

"This" was a narrow-shouldered, sunk-en-chested, rather wild-eyed old man who slouched into headquarters from the street. His watery eyes blinked in the glare of the brilliant light, and he eyed the crowd of uniformed men dazedly. From Sergeant O'Brien came a muttered:

"The' owld geezer looks half cracked."

The old man, apparently upward of sixty years of age, appeared bewildered. He shifted uncertainly from one foot to the other, undecided as to what to do next. Then he timidly inquired for the chief of police.

"Not in the city," answered one of the policemen. "What do you want?"

"Who—who is in charge here?" faltered the old fellow.

The policeman designated Commissioner Hall, and immediately the newcomer turned toward him. His weak eyes

roved here and there about the room, apparently unable to come to rest for any time on any definite object. Hall turned away quickly.

"Take charge of him, O'Brien. I haven't time to waste with——"

"I want to see you, sir," said the little fellow. "My name is Badger, Frederick Badger."

Hall's subconscious mind vaguely recalled that the name was not unfamiliar. Frederick Badger. Badger? Where had he heard the name before?

He turned to the old man and touched him gently on the shoulder.

"I'm the police commissioner. You wanted to see me privately?"

"Yes, sir; if you're in charge here."

"I am. Come this way. Come along, Carroll."

He led the way to the policemen's rest room, Badger following him timidly, Carroll bringing up the rear. Hall closed the

door carefully and faced the little fellow.

“What is it you wish?”

Badger cleared his throat; he was very ill at ease.

“I guess you’ve heard my name from Mr. Hamilton, sir; haven’t you?”

Hamilton! Why, of course. Hamilton had spoken of some one named Badger. Hall scrutinized the man with interest. Why had he mentioned Hamilton, of all people?

“Well——” started Hall somewhat brusquely, and then, at sight of the man’s pitiful dejection, he softened his tone considerably. “What can I do for you?”

By way of answer, the queer little fellow dived down into a capacious pocket of his frayed summer coat. And then Hall started back with an exclamation of surprise, for from its depths Frederick Badger produced an ugly revolver. Quite calmly he extended it to Hall.

“That’s it, sir.”

"That's—that's—what?"

"The revolver, sir. The one I used."

"Used for what?" Hall dimly realized that the little old man was driving at something in connection with the Hamilton killing.

"Didn't you know that Mr. Hamilton had been killed?" he inquired anxiously, as though surprised that the police department should have so long remained in ignorance of an important occurrence.

"Yes, yes—we know that Mr. Hamilton is dead. But what have you and this gun to do with it."

The answer of Mr. Frederick Badger was quite naïve.

"You see," he explained slowly, "*that* is the revolver I used when I killed him!" ..

CHAPTER III

FOR a few seconds Hall was stunned by the import of the words of the simple little man. Then he was conscious of an insane desire to laugh aloud. He glanced at David Carroll, and saw the little detective staring keenly from his fishy eyes at the latest personage to hold the centre of the stage in the tragedy.

Then gradually Hall began to understand what the confession of Frederick Badger might mean to the girl in the other room who had also confessed to the crime. If Badger had killed Hamilton, then it followed as a matter of course that the girl had not done so. Somewhere, somehow, there was a mistake. Then he was conscious of the fact that Badger was talking.

"He wouldn't give me my due," he was explaining painstakingly, "and I told him I was going to kill him, so I did it."

Carroll took the revolver and "broke" it with a deft motion. Four loaded cartridges and one exploded shell clattered to the floor. The empty shell was picked up by the boyish-looking detective, and he smelled it.

"Recent," was all he said. Badger gazed at him in surprise.

"Of course," he explained. "I killed him less than an hour ago and walked right down here to give myself up."

Commissioner Hall faced the little man curiously.

"You are quite sure that you killed him?"

"Of course I killed him. I told him I was going to, and I did. I left his house about eight o'clock, went down to a pawnshop on Halsey Street near Oak and bought that revolver and the bullets."

Immediately Carroll made his way to a telephone. Within three minutes he was back.

"That part of the story is true. It's Simpson's pawnshop, and he remembers the sale distinctly. One of those bullets has been fired since the revolver was bought." He examined the gun closely. "It's a regulation police revolver, too."

"How can that be?" questioned Hall sharply.

"Some discharged policeman, probably, pawned his service revolver."

"Then the case is simple," snapped Hall hopefully. "The bullet which really killed him can be identified by its size. If this old man did it, it will be proven beyond a doubt by the size of the bullet found at the autopsy."

"If I killed him?" echoed Badger. "Don't you understand?—I *did* kill him. That's what I came here to tell you. I bought the revolver and went back there

through the garden and stood on the veranda and killed him—in the dark!”

“You——” Hall slapped his hand against his knee. “By George, Carroll, that’s the second person who has made some reference to killing Hamilton ‘in the dark’!”

Badger seemed a bit dazed at the refusal of these men to take his confession of murder quite seriously. Carroll was silent, tight-lipped, keenly observant—the lethal weapon held in his right hand.

Once again the police commissioner took stock of the latest figure in the sensational case. The man seemed even smaller, weaker, and more dejected than when he exploded his confession of the crime to which some one else had already confessed. He was, above all things, meek; meek and intensely out of place. But he was determined that he had killed Hamilton, and with cause! That “with cause” feature of the confession impressed Clement Hall.

Eunice Duval had refused to give details.

"Suppose you tell us what happened to-night, Mr. Badger," he suggested. "Start at the beginning and tell us everything."

The old man spread his skinny fingers in a helpless gesture.

"There isn't anything to tell except that I killed him and ran away."

"You ran away?"

"Yes."

"If you intended to come down here and confess to the crime, why did you run away?"

"I was frightened. The noise scared me—the noise and the dark."

Here Carroll interrupted, his voice soft and soothing:

"What do you mean by repeating that you shot him in the dark? Where was he when you shot?"

"In his living room on the other side of the big table. I was on the veranda by the window."

"You shot through the window?"

"Yes. It was half open. One side of it was open."

"Now what about the darkness? You've said twice that you shot in the dark."

Badger passed a trembling hand across his forehead.

"That's the funny part of it. I took careful aim at Mr. Hamilton, and just before I pulled the trigger the lights went out."

"The lights in the room where he was standing?"

"Yes, sir; they all went out and the room was very dark. Then, in about five seconds, they flashed on again, and I saw him falling, and I ran away."

"Did you hear anything else—another shot?"

"I don't know. You see, I wasn't thinking about anything except myself. There might have been another shot."

“Would you have heard it if there had been?”

Badger stared at him blankly.

“Maybe; I don’t know.”

Hall was settled back in his chair, listening amazedly to the dialogue. The thing was ludicrous—Carroll, who looked like a fussy college boy and was a truly great detective, discussing a case with a watery-eyed, harmless-appearing old man who confessed to murder. The thing was not at all as it should have been; there was as little of the detective in Carroll’s appearance as there was of the murderer in Badger’s.

Of one thing Hall was already convinced, that, whether or not Badger had killed Hamilton, he was not quite sane. There was an occasional gleam in his weak old eyes when Hamilton’s name was mentioned that denoted a mild form of mania. Carroll continued his questioning.

"Now suppose you tell us, Mr. Badger," he said quietly, "why you killed Mr. Hamilton?"

"Because I told him I was going to."

"When did you tell him that?"

"Tonight about eight o'clock. He laughed at me and told me not to let a little thing make me try anything foolish. Then I went down to the pawnshop and bought the revolver and went back and shot him in the dark."

In the dark! In the dark! Eunice had spoken of shooting "in the dark."

"Why," persisted Carroll easily, "did you tell Mr. Hamilton that you were going to kill him?"

"Because he stole my money."

"Hamilton stole your money?" burst in Hall brusquely. "That's ridiculous! The man was worth a fortune."

Again that flash of fury in Badger's eyes—a fire spark that died out almost as soon as born.

"I don't care how much he had," he insisted. "He stole my money."

"When?"

"Fifteen years ago."

"Damned rot!" chortled Hall. "This man is crazy!"

"Just a minute, Mr. Hall," interrupted Carroll. "Tell us all about it, Mr. Badger."

"He took my money—it was on a proposition to develop oil lands. Then he said he sent down an engineer and the engineer said there wasn't any oil there. But I knew—I knew——" Badger rose to his feet, and as he talked his manner became more violent and his voice rose to a crescendo. "I know how these rich men get rich! They steal their money from us poor people. He took all my money, and I know there was oil there. He said there wasn't, and all my money was gone. I asked him to give it back to me, and he said he was sorry, but that he had lost three

times as much as I had. And there *was* oil there—there was oil on the land when I bought it.” The old man had worked himself into a frenzy. He gesticulated wildly and paced the room. “Oh, he had it coming to him! For fifteen years I have visited him two or three times a week; I’ve warned him and I’ve threatened him. I told him that he couldn’t get away with it. But he’s got a stone heart. He didn’t have any right to live. Tonight he laughed at me and said I was a ‘poor nut.’ Me, whose money he stole. And I told him I was going to kill him—and——” Suddenly the frenzy of passion disappeared. In the fraction of an instant he was metamorphosed from the victim of a monomania to his natural, harmless, helpless, inoffensive self. “And so I went to the pawnshop and bought the revolver and went back to the house and killed him. And then I came down here and gave myself up.”

“Do you realize what this means for you?”

Badger shrugged.

“There wasn’t anything in life for me, anyway. And maybe it’ll teach these rich people a lesson. I told him I was going to kill him, and then I went right down to the pawnshop——”

“Yes, yes; we understand that. We’ll hold you now. I’m sorry you had to shoot him——”

Again Badger was on his feet.

“He stole my money! He stole it!”

Carroll reached over to the desk at which Hall was sitting and pressed a buzzer.

“Put him in charge of one of your best men personally,” he ordered. “See to it that he is allowed to speak to no one. Not even to Rollins.”

When Badger had been led away and the two men were alone, Hall lighted a cigar and puffed violently for a few minutes.

"Of course it's damned rot!" he said at length.

"What?" queried the detective in a mild tone.

"That fool notion that Hamilton stole his money. More than probably he went to Hamilton with some wildcat scheme and got some of Hamilton's money in on it. And of course—— Oh, damn it all, anyway! It's my opinion that the man is crazy."

Carroll's answer was as calm and steady as though he were remarking on the weather:

"Undoubtedly he is. But crazy men can kill people."

"Of course he killed—but Eunice said *she* killed him."

"H'mph! Suppose you go in and tell Miss Eunice that this man has confessed and see what she says. Ask her first if she knows who Badger is?"

"If she'll see me." Hall started for the

door. "I can't make head or tail of it. I'll tell her, though."

His knock was answered by Mrs. Faber, and only after pleading with the girl through her did Eunice consent to speak to him.

He found her lying on the couch staring, dry-eyed, at the ceiling. Her face was pallid, and one hand hung limply over the side of the couch. She spoke without turning her head:

"What is it, Mr. Hall?"

"I hate to bother you, Eunice; but there's been a terrible mistake somewhere, and I want you to help me out. Tell me first, do you know of a man named Frederick Badger?"

She turned her face to the wall.

"I thought you wanted to see me about something important, Mr. Hall. I'm not at all well, and I wish——"

"But this is important; really it is. Do you know of him?"

"Of course I do!" she said somewhat sharply. "He's been bothering Mr.—Mr.—Hamilton for years. They were in some business deal together. Mr. Hamilton thought he was crazy."

"I see."

"And now, if that's all you wanted to know, I wish you'd go. I don't want to see any one except Mr. Denson. He hasn't come yet, has he?"

"No. Eunice, please, won't you take a friend's advice and retract your confession?"

"Of course not! I killed him. That's all I have to say."

"But you did *not* kill him," said Hall desperately. "That man has already confessed to Mr. Hamilton's murder!"

The effect of his words was electrical. The girl's figure stiffened, grew rigid; then in a flash she was on her feet, bosom heaving, eyes flashing, fists clenched.

"You're lying! You know you are lying!"

Hall gave back a step.

"Eunice! You know I'm not. He has confessed to the killing."

"It's a lie!" A pause, and then:
"What man?"

"Frederick Badger!"

"O-o-o-h!" As suddenly as she had risen, she relaxed. The light died from her eyes. She crumpled on the couch.
"Why—why—didn't you say *that*?"

"I did. I explained. That's why I asked you who he was. If you'll withdraw your confession now we'll probably let you go home. Badger killed him."

She turned her haggard face to him.

"I told you Badger is crazy. I repeat it. He didn't kill Mr. Hamilton. I did—shot him with his own revolver!"

"But, Eunice——"

"Mrs. Faber," she said weakly, "please make Mr. Hall go. He means well, but I

can't stand much more of this. I—I'll go to pieces again in a minute."

Hall was hurt. He bowed in the girl's direction.

"I'll go, Mrs. Faber, but there is a mistake. She didn't kill Mr. Hamilton. This man Badger insists that he did. He bought a revolver and went there and shot him——"

The eyes of the little housekeeper lighted.

"That explains the second shot."

"What second shot?"

"There were two shots, sir. I was in my room in bed. I heard a shot—that echoed all around. Then there was another shot. I put my wrapper on, and when I got downstairs Mr. Hamilton was——was——" She glanced significantly toward the huddled figure of the girl on the couch. "You understand, sir."

"Yes, I understand. I think I do. The shot that echoed was the one from in-

side the room. The other was from outside. What a mess!"

He left the two women together and told his story to Carroll.

"That simplifies things," said Carroll. "We'll have an autopsy performed and discover whether Hamilton was killed by a bullet from a police revolver. Badger's weapon was undoubtedly one."

Hall shook his head.

"They're performing the autopsy now," he said, "but that will tell us nothing. The girl says she used Hamilton's revolver. That revolver was a present to him from me—and it was the duplicate of the one Badger used!"

Hall shook his head.

"That makes it a little harder. And Miss Duval still refuses to go into details?"

"Yes. She insists on seeing Denson first. I can't blame her. Poor little kid,

she's gone through hell this night. She's a wreck. And now I haven't yet telephoned Rollins." He turned to the instrument on his desk, but Carroll stopped him.

"Don't; not yet. Let him work over the ground. Maybe he'll run across something which will prove which one really killed him."

"Ye-e-s; perhaps he will. I'm almost afraid that he will."

Carroll looked up sharply.

"I see you think the girl's bullet did it?" he said interrogatively.

Hall flushed dully.

"I think nothing," he said curtly. "However, I'll let Rollins remain."

For some minutes they sat quietly, Hall puffing on a cigar and Carroll raptly contemplating the glowing end of a Turkish cigarette. Then there was a violent knock at the door.

"Come in!" And in response to Hall's command a young officer burst into the room.

"A young man to see you immediately—Mr. Hall—he says you know him; his name is Harrelson—Vincent Harrelson."

Hall felt Carroll's eyes upon him, and he gave answer to the unspoken query:

"Yes, it's Vincent Harrelson, the artist. I think—mind you, I don't know—that he was secretly engaged to Eunice."

"A-a-h! Let's go see what he wants."

Again the man they saw did not fit into the picture. Artist he was, but not at all the painter depicted in fiction. He was more than six feet in height, broad of shoulder and very deep of chest. His big, soft, brown eyes contained a strange light; there was suppressed excitement in his manner. He made his way immediately to Hall.

"They told me the chief of police was out of the city and that you were here," he

said swiftly, the words almost tumbling over one another. "You know who I am—and you know something about family conditions——"

"Yes, I understand."

"I just came in to give myself up, sir. About an hour ago I quarreled with Mr. Hamilton—and *I killed him!*"

CHAPTER IV.

OUT of the stillness which followed the young man's announcement came the mumbled words of a policeman:

"Begorra, this murder is just one damned confession after another!" Then some one said: "Hush, you fool!" and there was quiet again.

Clement Hall was too startled for immediate speech. His jaw dropped and his figure slumped limply. The young man stared at him in surprise, and then curiously at David Carroll, who was eyeing him with a deliberation which brought a slow flush of anger to the young artist's face. He fidgeted uncomfortably. Finally he broke out irritably:

"What are *you* staring at? And why?"

By way of answer Carroll flipped back

the lapel of his coat, disclosing his badge. Harrelson subsided. Carroll spoke softly:

"This way, young man, and you, too, commissioner, if you please."

A battery of curious eyes followed their progress across the sombre hall, and as the door of the rest room closed behind them a bedlam of comment and conjecture broke loose.

The case had piled sensation on sensation until it had long since passed the point of plausibility. Larry O'Brien waxed garrulous.

"Be all the saints, 'tis spooky! Usually whin a murder is done we hunt for the guilty. This time we have two guilty wans and have to hunt for the innocent. Bedad, they lied whin they said that wonders have ceased!"

Meanwhile, in the rest room, David Carroll was questioning Vincent Harrelson in his habitual calm, unperturbed way. His first effort was to discover if the young man

knew that any one else had confessed.

“You say you killed Hamilton?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“We quarreled when I visited his house tonight. We have quarreled several times before. It is strictly a personal matter. I believe Mr. Hall was sufficiently intimate at Hamilton’s home to understand.”

Hall nodded.

“I believe I do.”

“You shot him in cold blood?” asked Carroll deliberately.

The young man leaped to his feet.

“Good God, no! We quarreled bitterly and he lost his head. He hit me here.” Harrelson exhibited a red spot on his left cheek. “I grappled with him and he tore loose. We were in the library then. He dashed to the table, picked up a paper weight, and would have thrown it at me, but I held him. When finally I let

him go—and it is more than possible that I handled him a bit roughly—he ran into the next room and took a revolver from the drawer of the table. I grabbed his wrist and got the revolver away from him. Then it went off—how, I don't know. He fell, and that's all."

"That's *all*?"

"Yes."

"You're sure?"

The young man straightened nervously.

"Say, look here, what are you driving at? I've told you that was all!"

Apparently Carroll was looking at a set of dominoes spread out on the table before him. His next remark was as casual as a comment on an item in the day's news:

"How about the switching off of the lights?"

But, disinterested as he seemed, he did not miss the sudden pallor of Harrelson's cheeks. The young man opened his mouth to speak, closed it again, and rose.

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I refuse to say anything further!"

Carroll's voice grew cold as steel.

"What about the switching off of the lights?" he snapped. "And who fired the other shot?"

Harrelson gripped the edge of his chair.

"I have nothing further to say at this time. I've told you I killed Mr. Hamilton, and that's all I'm going to tell you. I wish you'd put me in a cell or wherever I am to be put."

"You're a very foolish young man," said Carroll. "If I were you——"

"You're not. And I'll be exceedingly obliged if you'll keep your advice to yourself."

Clement Hall touched the artist on the arm.

"He's trying to help you, Mr. Harrelson."

"I haven't asked for help from any one.

I've come down here to give myself up for killing a man. The duty of the police department is very plain. There's nothing else to the case."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Harrelson," said Carroll in his characteristically friendly manner. "I am in charge of this case, and I know several things about it which you think I do not know. Since you have seen fit to assume a hostile attitude, I will not mince matters. Put in plain English, your story is false as to several salient facts. I happen to know that just before Mr. Hamilton was shot the lights went out. They remained out for about six seconds. Then they snapped on again. Therefore, we are presented with one very pertinent question: Who switched those lights off and who switched them on again, and why? Have you anything to say about that?"

Harrelson looked up sullenly.

"Nothing."

"Item number one," retorted Carroll with sudden and incisive coldness. "Item number two is the fact that there were two shots, one evidently in the dark and one immediately after the lights were switched on. Which shot, if you please, did you fire?"

"I fired the shot which killed Mr. Hamilton," came the stolid answer.

"You are quite sure?"

"You can prove it easily enough. Get the bullet which killed him and see if it does not fit his revolver. That will answer you. I don't know anything about any second shot."

"You mean you won't tell?"

"Have it your own way. I've said all I intend to."

"Who else was in the room at the time of the shooting?"

"I have nothing more to say."

Carroll smiled.

"That answer is perfectly satisfactory."

Then to Hall: "I will hold this young man in one of the cells under special guard. No one is to be allowed to discuss the case with him. Is that satisfactory?"

"You're in charge, Carroll. My interest is far more personal than official."

A sergeant was called and the prisoner placed in his charge with instructions not to discuss any phase of the case with him. Once alone, the two men faced each other and Carroll laughed shortly.

"It *is* a poser," he admitted. "The most interesting case I have ever worked. The usual order of things is reversed. We have three people claiming guilt for a crime which only one could have committed. H'mph! That young man is very —er—tart."

"Temperament!" snorted Hall. "He's an artist!"

"And, I believe you said, engaged to Miss Duval?"

"That's the bone of contention between

him and Hamilton. Hamilton, I suspect, was deeply in love with Miss Duval; and even under normal circumstances he would not have been overly fond of the man whom she happened to love. That, then, was the case between them basically.

“But Hamilton was superconscientious. I believe he was broad enough to have sanctioned her marriage with Harrelson had he found no fault with the young man personally. But whether it was true or not, whether or not it was just—he was sincere in the belief that Harrelson was after Miss Duval’s money, that he was worthless personally, that he was lazy, and that he was rather much of a Lothario.”

“Hmm! His temperament—would it be of the kind——”

“I know exactly what you are thinking; you’re wondering whether he would be quixotic enough to surrender himself for a crime the girl had committed? Isn’t that it?”

"Yes."

"I don't know. He might and he might not. On the other hand, he has exhibited a certain strength of character in giving himself up at all, especially if a rigid investigation would have implicated her. He could have gotten away."

"I'm not so sure," said Carroll slowly. "And remember this, that if he told us the strict and whole truth—which he quite evidently did not—no jury in the world would convict him of anything. But there is something wrong somewhere. He may have lied as to the darkness and the second shot in order to shield the girl. On the other hand, he may have killed the man himself, formulated this self-defence story, and thought to bluff it out. I don't know the significance of the sudden darkness at the time of the shooting, but that it did have something to do with it I am sure."

"That whole phase of it," snapped Hall

somewhat irritably, "strikes me as silly. Who would have turned out the lights in the room at that particular time, and why? Certainly it was no time for domestic pyrotechnics. And, besides, while we are discussing whether Miss Duval or Harrelson may be the guilty one, we have completely forgotten old man Badger, the one person who has supplied confession, motive, evidence, and testimony."

"No-o, Mr. Hall—I hadn't quite forgotten Badger. Without him the case is complicated enough. With him—it is—er—interesting, very interesting. I suggest that you telephone Doctor Robinson; he should have found the bullet by this time."

Doctor Robinson had found the bullet, and Doctor Robinson was desirous of coming down to see Mr. Hall immediately. He came, and a quick and thorough examination showed that the lethal bullet was of the same calibre as that used in the offi-

cial police revolvers. Hall looked at Carroll and Carroll looked at Hall.

"It would have been queer," remarked Carroll easily, "if something had turned up to bewilder us more. Although that would have been well-nigh impossible."

Hall laughed shortly. He questioned the doctor:

"The man was only shot once; you are quite sure?"

"Just once. I am positive of it."

"Where was he shot?"

"Through the heart. The bullet entered his left side."

"Would you say, after close investigation, doctor," questioned Carroll, "that the bullet that killed him was fired from very close to him?"

Doctor Robinson looked up in some surprise.

"Why, no; I should say most emphatically that it was fired from a distance."

"The distance of a few feet?"

“More than that. I do not pretend to be an expert in such matters, but I should hazard a guess that the person who killed him fired from a distance of at least twenty-five feet.”

Carroll thanked the doctor briefly and requested him to take charge of the body with the coroner. After the man of medicine had gone, Hall sank weakly into a chair and spread his hands helplessly.

“I give it up altogether,” he said hopelessly. “He is certain that the bullet was fired from a distance. Badger’s bullet was the only one fired from a distance. Eunice Duval insists that she was in the room with him, and, while she gave no details, she led us to believe that they were close together. Harrelson maintains that they were struggling when the shot was fired. Evidence of that would have been unmistakable—powder marks and the sear of the flame. I am convinced that Harrelson confessed to save Eunice, although

what she had to do with it—— Good Lord! the thing is fearful!”

“I’m not convinced of anything—yet,” said Carroll slowly. “Not even that Harrelson did not do it himself.”

“But, great goodness, man, he *couldn’t* have done it if he was grappling with the man!”

“How do we know that he *was* grappling with him? He lied to us about the sudden darkness; he swears he knows nothing about a second shot. Why is it not possible that both he and Miss Duval shot?”

“Hamilton was only hit once.”

“One might have missed and the other finished it.”

“You’re crazy. They are not members of a murderers’ club. Your beastly theories——”

“Easy, there, Mr. Hall—you’re letting your personal interest run away with your sounder judgment. I have merely ad-

vanced theories, none of which do I believe.”

“Then for God’s sake tell me what you *do* believe!”

“I prefer not to. I’d rather work the case my own way. It ought not prove a very difficult task to disclose the innocence of those who are innocent.”

“And we have the guilty one dead to rights?”

“Yes, we have the guilty one dead to rights.”

“I—I’m glad you’re in charge of the case, Carroll. You’re so—so—damned impersonal!”

“That’s my business. Just at present I’m willing to admit frankly that, being only human, I’m about as confused as you are. I want to get off by myself and think. Which I cannot do with that infernal noise dinning in my ears.”

The noise was the clanging of the police patrol which swung in from the street to

the courtyard, gong clanging and muffer cut out. Carroll and the police commissioner strolled to the window and gazed out into the stone-flagged courtyard surrounded by its austere greystone wall and beyond that a frame of trees garlanded with the fresh leaves of early summer. It was Hall who recognized the man in charge of the wagon.

“By George, it’s Barrett Rollins!”

Carroll evinced sudden interest.

“So it is,” he said quietly, eyeing the heavy-set form of the chief of the regular detective force. “And he’s got a wounded man in that wagon. I wonder if he’s been using his revolver again to bring down some poor suspect. That’s a habit of his—firing his revolver rather indiscriminately.”

“He’s been on the carpet for it a half dozen times,” answered Hall. “I wonder now——”

“I suggest that you have him sent in

here," said Carroll. "He may have something of interest to tell us."

In response to orders, Barrett Rollins entered the room a few minutes later. But he was not alone.

With him was a huge man, lantern-jawed, shaggy-haired, and with glowing eyes which flamed from beneath heavy lashes. Rollins' attitude was one of triumph; then he flushed with sudden fury as his eyes fell on the figure of Carroll. But Carroll was staring at the blood-stained bandage around the hand and wrist of the prisoner.

"What you doin' here?" Rollins demanded gruffly.

Carroll shrugged.

"You might ask Mr. Hall."

Hall spoke softly:

"I've placed Mr. Carroll in charge of the Hamilton case, Rollins. Absolutely in charge."

Rollins' face took on a sneer.

"You can let your fine Sherlock Holmes go," he said triumphantly. "Because the case is solved. This here man is Red Hartigan, alias Rio Red, alias Pete Hartigan——"

"Yes, yes!" Hall was leaning forward anxiously. "What about him?"

Rollins chuckled.

"*Red Hartigan,*" he exulted, "*is the man who murdered Mr. Hamilton!*"

CHAPTER V

A HOARSE cry broke from the lips of the wounded prisoner. He tore away from his captor and stepped forward swiftly, waving the stained bandage in the very face of Hall and Carroll.

“It’s a damned lie!” he croaked hoarsely. “I was in that house, an’ I was in there to steal, but I didn’t kill, and when he says I did he lies!”

Hall was conscious of one rather ridiculous thought—he was relieved that one person at least protested innocence.

Rollins reached out a sinewy arm and wrapped his fingers around the prisoner’s uninjured wrist.

“Keep a civil tongue between them damned crooked lips of yours, Hartigan.

You can't get away with such stuff as that."

Carroll was apparently not at all interested in the prisoner or his captor. He was scribbling on a bit of paper, and at length he slid it across the table toward Hall. Rollins caught the bit of byplay and scowled darkly at the little detective. Hall read:

"Let me handle this. Rollins is to know nothing at all about Badger. I will have Badger removed at once."

Hall nodded, and immediately Carroll reclaimed the paper, which he tore into tiny bits and carefully placed in a vest pocket. The whole thing was done in the most casual manner. Rollins voiced a sneer:

"Old sleuth! Behind time, as usual."

"I'd be a bit more civil, Rollins," said Hall sharply. "Until I choose to remove him, Mr. Carroll is your superior officer and must be accorded due respect."

Rollins shrugged.

“Obedience he’ll get,” he rasped, “but respect I’ll not give him. I’ve only contempt for such as him.”

“I tell you——” but Carroll put a quiet, restraining hand on Hall’s arm.

“No use to get excited, Mr. Hall. I can well understand how Rollins feels at having a rank outsider brought in and put over his head. I think we’ll get along better when he understands that I am working with him and not against him.”

The detective rose, and, crossing the room, placed himself squarely in front of Rollins. He spoke quietly and forcefully:

“I want you to understand, Rollins, that we’re not to pull against each other. You don’t like me and I can’t say that I’m wasting any love on you. But this is not a personal matter, and I’d rather work it as your ally. I’m perfectly willing to listen to your advice, and I haven’t a doubt

that a good deal of it will be worth taking. I shall not use my authority unless I consider it necessary. After the case is finished you have my permission to vilify me as much as you choose. Until then I'd rather that we pulled together. How about it?"

Rollins stared at the little fellow curiously.

"You're a funny sort of a boob," he vouchsafed at length. "I don't like you—never have and never will—and for three cents I'd resign my job. I think it's a rotten deal, this calling in an outsider to get the glory for a case that I've solved in an hour. But there's a lot of common sense in what you say, and if you are willing to pull with me, I'm no damned fool. I'll say it's a go!"

"Good! And one more thing, Rollins—my name will not figure in the case. So far as the newspapers are concerned, you are in charge. Now to business."

Rollins was mollified in spite of himself. He seated himself and motioned the captive to a chair. Much of the aggressiveness had dropped from his grim visage as he prepared for Carroll's quiet questioning.

"Suppose you tell us why you think this man Hartigan killed Mr. Hamilton?" suggested Carroll.

"Sure!" Rollins lighted a rank brier and launched into his story:

"It's this way. When I gets to the house, the first thing I find out—this bein' from the old dame who ran the shebang for Hamilton—is that there was *two* shots fired; get that?"

"Yes."

"I poked my nose in on the doc who was making the autopsy, and he tells me the man was shot only once. So right away I get busy. I go into the room and find things just as they was with some one having had sense enough to mark the spot

on the floor where the man fell. It's a big room with a door opening on to a large veranda on the south side. Beyond that a garden. Next to the door one of these here big French windows. Then an L in the veranda and another French window facing east.

"Right in the angle of the room is one of these here fancy screens. The window was open. First crack out of the bat I find a police revolver on the floor. Here it is."

He tossed a blue steel weapon on the table. "As you'll see, one chamber has been fired. That revolver was half-way between the centre table and the screen. I step behind the screen, and I find this bird lying there with a hole in his wrist. By his side is this gun—another police revolver"—he laid a second weapon beside its twin—"and that, also, has been exploded once. It's the one this bucko used. See?"

"It's a lie!" broke out Hartigan desperately. "I didn't even carry a gun."

"Keep your mouth shut! We'll let you talk later. As I was sayin', in the screen I find a bullet hole, and the case is simple as A B C. Right alongside Hartigan is a bundle of swag. What happened was that he was cleanin' out the house when Hamilton hears a noise; Hartigan ducks behind the screen, but Hamilton knows he's there. Hamilton takes a pot shot at him an' hits him in the wrist; Hartigan shoots back and kills his man. And if that needs more explainin' I don't see where it comes in."

Carroll spoke without raising his eyes:

"You are sure these are police revolvers, Rollins?"

"Sure as I am that you're sitting there."

"Hmm! Where did you get this gun, Hartigan?"

The prisoner shook his head hopelessly.

"I'm telling youse I didn't have no gat.

I ain't never carried one. Rollins knows that as well as I do; he's got a line on all of us yeggs, an' he knows them that carries guns and them that don't. A burglary charge I don't mind facin'; but murder, no. You go ask my pals if they've ever known me to carry a gun; they'll tell you not."

"Suppose *you* tell us what happened."

The confessed burglar leaned forward eagerly.

"It was this way. A pal o' mine and me——"

"Who?"

Hartigan flushed. "I ain't no squealer; y'can find that out for yourself. A pal o' mine frames with me to crack this Hamilton crib. We go in together, leavin' a lookout by the road in front of the garden. I get one bag of loot and he gets the other. It's all framed that I'm to go out through the winder of that room. I get in there, and right away I hear two fellers scrap-

pin' in the next room. I duck behind screen. The two guys come, fightin', in the room——”

“Nobody else in there?”

“Yes; that's the funny part. Just they come in, battin' hell out of each other—one of 'em bein' Hamilton an' the other one a big man I don't know—a girl stut out from behind some curtains over window in the other corner of the room over beyond the door.

“Hamilton breaks loose from the feller and makes a jump for the tall. He yanks a gun outa the drawer. The man gets him before he can shoot. They scrap around; then all of a sudden it gets dark, and I hear two shots, and I get *th*. He held up his wrist. “I hang on there for a while, afraid they're going to hit me. I feel right sick, so I lay down on the floor. Then I don't remember a thing else until this bull,” pointing to Flins, “has me in the hospital gettin' fi

up. Then he brings me here. An' that's the truth, s'help me Gawd!"

Carroll nodded briefly.

"Call Cartwright, will you, Rollins?"

Rollins did as bidden, and into Cartwright's custody the prisoner was given, with explicit instructions not to allow him to speak of the case to any one. Then Carroll excused himself, called a young protégé of his who wore the uniform of the force, and this man he placed on special duty before the concrete cell in which Badger had been placed.

"Under no circumstances," he ordered, "is any one to be allowed to talk to this man. If he wants anything, or insists on seeing some one, call me. Understand? No one—Rollins or even the chief of police. I'm in charge of the case. Get it?"

The young officer nodded.

"I understand, Mr. Carroll. He'll not be allowed to talk to any one. I'll stick right here."

“Good! I’ll remember you. And I’m trusting you. You’re not even to talk to him yourself. If any one asks who is in here, refuse to answer.”

Carroll returned to the rest room. Hal was sitting, as Carroll had left him, at the big domino table. Rollins slouched by the window, staring at nothing. Finally he turned and addressed Hall:

“That’s all, isn’t it?”

“Better ask Carroll, Rollins.”

“How about it, Carroll?”

“I’m afraid it isn’t, Rollins. There’s more to the case than you seem to know.”

“It’s open and shut. There’s your two shots; Hartigan popping at Hamilton at Hamilton at him. They both hit an’ one of ’em croaks. The man’s story about the fight and all that is a rotten lie—thinner’n water. My Gawd, I don’t see what else you could want! His story don’t hold for a minute——”

“Ye-e-es, I believe it does. What yo

don't know is this: Two people have already given themselves up tonight for killing Mr. Hamilton!"

"Huh!" Rollins stared first at Carroll's placid face and then at Commissioner Hall. "Two people! Aw, what is this, a joke party?"

"I'm deadly serious. Hartigan says Hamilton was fighting with a man, and that there was a girl in the room. That man and that girl are both here in this police station under arrest for Hamilton's killing. The story that each tells exactly jibes with Hartigan's. Undoubtedly one of the bullets was fired from the revolver you found on the floor. And the other must have come from Hartigan's revolver."

"Sure! Sure! Only—it seems sorter funny—two people giving themselves up! On the level, you ain't stringing me, are you?"

"No! Now as to that second shot.

There's no question that it was fired. By the way, where did you find Hartigan's revolver? Didn't you say it was in his pocket?"

Rollins answered very slowly:

"Yes, it was in his pocket. I found it there."

"I suppose he put it there after he shot at Hamilton. He was quite conscious; he admitted that when he said he felt himself getting weak and laid down gently so they wouldn't hear him fall. Yes, he must have shot Hamilton."

Rollins stared keenly at the other.

"Sure, he shot Hamilton! What gets me is this man and the girl giving themselves up an' saying they done it. Who are they?"

"Hamilton's ward, Miss Eunice Duval, and a young artist named Harrelson."

"Vincent Harrelson?"

"Yes."

"Him and her is pretty good friends, ain't they?"

"Yes—why do you ask?"

"Nothin', only it strikes me that maybe both are lyin'."

Hall broke in shortly:

"People don't usually go around trying to fasten the crime of murder on their own heads, Rollins."

"No-o."

"You're quite sure," persisted Carroll, "that you found that revolver in Hartigan's pocket?"

Rollins rose to his feet.

"Say, what th' hell you harping on that for? Of course I found it in his pocket. It was there when I drug him from behind the screen. Thought he'd croaked until I seen he'd only keeled over from loss of blood. It was him that done it, all right."

"It looks that way. But why the confessions of Miss Duval and Harrelson?"

Rollins pondered deeply, and then suddenly he smiled with the light of inspiration.

“Cinch!”

“How?”

“There’s most likely something between them. They was both there—providin’ what Hartigan says is true. There was a lot of excitement. The girl thinks the man done it an’ the man thinks the girl did, an’ each one is sayin’ that the other done it so’s to save ’em. You read about that all the time.”

Carroll thought deeply. Then he brought his fist down on the table with a crash.

“You’re right, Rollins! You must be right! They all say that the lights went out just when the shooting took place, and both Miss Duval and Mr. Harrelson think that the other did it. So they both confess. It’s simple. I take my hat off to you. I’ll confess frankly that I never

would have thought of it. I think you've solved it."

Rollins flushed with pardonable pride.

"Us regular bulls ain't the fools we're given credit for bein', Mr. Carroll," he said, respectfully, glowing under the other's praise. "All you gotta do now is tell 'em about Hartigan and you'll see 'em withdraw their confessions so quick it'll make your head swim. Y'see, Mr. Hall, there wasn't no need for having any one else in on the case—not that I'm sore at Mr. Carroll here. He's man enough to admit I got the goods right."

Carroll rose and extended his hand. Rollins crushed it in a viselike grip.

"You're all right, Rollins. I admit it cheerfully."

"Thanks, Mr. Carroll. And there ain't no hard feelin's over my bein' sore at you?"

"Not a one. I understand it perfectly. And now suppose you look after Hartigan.

I want to get things straightened up with Mr. Hall. He's a personal friend of Miss Duval, and he'll have to tell her himself."

"That's all right. Good night, gentlemen!" And Barrett Rollins, chief of the plain-clothes staff, bowed himself out.

For a while Carroll stared at the door through which he had gone, and then he sank into a chair and thrummed on the table. Hall leaned forward, very much puzzled.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "You certainly don't think the case is finished?"

Carroll laughed sharply.

"Certainly not. It's just begun."

"Of course it might be that Hartigan killed Mr. Hamilton and the two young people confessed to save one another."

"It might be," said Carroll shortly, "but I'm very much of the opinion that it isn't. You see, Mr. Hall—you are completely overlooking a certain Mr. Frederick Badger!"

CHAPTER VI

HALL opened his lips to speak, closed them suddenly without uttering a sound, and then repeated the fishlike motion. Carroll laughed.

"It *is* grim, but it's funny," he remarked.

"It's—damnable! Yes, sir, that's the word for it. Here we have three people confessing to a crime and a fourth hedged about with almost incontrovertible circumstantial evidence. And now my pet theory is exploded."

"Which is?"

"*Was*," corrected Hall, "that Badger did the fatal shooting."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Hall," said Carroll kindly, "that you are ready to fasten the guilt on the one suspect most likely to be

freed by a jury. Undoubtedly Badger is demented. I've seen men with the same look, and they were not men who were mentally normal. And now let me tell you what I have done so that you will play your cards accordingly. No one here except you and I know that Badger has confessed to the crime. I want no one else to know it."

"Eunice Duval has been told."

"Rollins must not be allowed to talk to her."

"Very well. What you say goes—in this case. But why keep Rollins in the dark? Don't you believe his story about Hartigan?"

"I believe everything and I believe nothing. Nor have I drawn any definite conclusions as yet. I admit frankly that I am up in the air for a solution of the mystery—as much as you are. The girl tells a straight story—such as it is. Harrelson's story is also straight, and one reason

I am inclined to give it credence is that, whether true or false, it is so framed that no jury would convict him under those circumstances. Then we have the possibility that the man knows the girl did it and is confessing to save her. On the other hand, we have the possibility that the girl knows her sweetheart committed the crime and is confessing to save him. On the third hand we have Badger—who I firmly believe shot at Hamilton—the stories of Badger and the girl tally too closely. Our fourth is Hartigan, who stoutly denies having had a hand in the matter. Altogether, I think our first job is to get a car and take a look over the scene of the crime.”

Hall rose promptly.

“A good idea, Carroll. My car is outside.”

The men strolled to the main room. They spoke to various policemen and ignored a very pointed question from the

lips of top Sergeant Larry O'Brien. Orders were left that no one was to be allowed to see the girl or Harrelson until Hall's return, exception being made in the case of Mr. Samuel Denson, Eunice's lawyer. As the two men turned toward the door, Barrett Rollins rose to greet them.

"Going?" he queried idly.

Hall nodded.

"I'll be back."

"And you, Carroll?"

The little detective smiled genially.

"Oh, I'm trotting along! I'm afraid you knocked my props from under without giving me a chance to prove my ability."

Rollins grinned.

"Blarney! Good night to you!"

"Good night!"

The doorkeeper saluted as they passed out, and Hall seated himself at the wheel of his giant roadster; Carroll curled up in the deep upholstery beside him. Hall pressed the starter, and the rhythmic hum

of the motor answered immediately; and the car rolled smoothly and silently down the tree-lined avenue.

Neither man spoke. Hall, on his part, was busy driving, and his thoughts were too wildly chaotic to permit of coherent reasoning. But Carroll took advantage of the sudden removal from the scene of police activities to catalog the events of the night.

From a wide macadam roadway, Hall braked his car suddenly and swung in through a large, tree-studded lawn. For the first time since leaving the police station, Carroll spoke:

“This is the house?”

“Yes.”

“Stop a minute, please.”

As the car came to a halt a man in civilian's garb detached himself from the shadows and joined them. Then he recognized Hall and saluted punctiliously.

“Mr. Rollins has three of us detailed

here to watch, sir," he explained. "Two outside and one inside. We're to keep reporters away."

Hall nodded.

"That's right. This is Mr. David Carroll. He's in charge of this case and is to have the right of way. You may pass the word to the other men on duty here."

The policeman strode away and the two men left the automobile and trod the soft grass of the lawn.

To the right of the house there was a tennis court and to the left a lawn, dotted with trees and bushes, and extending more than two hundred yards to a brick wall which dropped sheer on the pavement.

"Is this the only house on this side of the street?" asked Carroll. "I've been here before, but I didn't notice details."

"Yes," came the prompt answer. "The house stands about the middle, and the property covers the entire square block. Hamilton was a very rich man."

"I see. Let's look it over."

They walked quietly about the grounds, inspecting every foot of the lawn. Then they crossed the lawn and mounted the steps which led to the centre of the veranda, a veranda different from the usual and modeled upon the Southern colonial style.

The front of the residence rose sheer from the ground, having merely a small flight of steps leading from the walk to a small vestibule, but the entire length of the house was bounded by the wide veranda, which ran the length of the library and living room, there to jut in with an abrupt L and thence along the narrower dining room.

There were two flights of steps leading to the veranda, one midway of its length, immediately opposite the head of which was the double door letting into the living room where the killing occurred. The other paralleled the L of the veranda diag-

onally opposite the corner of the dining room and living room.

Carroll paced the veranda slowly, then shook his head.

“It’s too dark out here, Hall. Suppose we go inside and look around.”

Hall led the way, made his mission known to the policeman on duty inside, gave orders that they were not to be disturbed, and closed the door of the living room behind them.

“Where is the light?” questioned Carroll with peculiar earnestness.

Hall scratched a match against his shoe. It flickered up quickly, illuminating the darkness with a ghastly glare and an array of dancing shadows. Then, guided by its feeble light, he walked unerringly across the room. His fingers found the electric-light switch, pressed it, and the room was bathed in light.

But Carroll was gazing only at the light switch. It was the usual two-button af-

fair situated midway between an oak-pannelled door and a large French window near the corner of the room. He questioned quietly:

“That window leads to the veranda?”

“Yes.”

“And the door?”

“Into the dining room.”

“You are familiar with the house?”

“Yes.”

“What lies beyond the dining room?”

“The butler’s pantry and the kitchen, on this side of the house, if that is what you mean.”

“Yes—that’s all I’m interested in at present. How far back does the veranda run?”

“To the end of the dining room.”

“Hmm! And didn’t I notice a screen protecting the corner of the veranda, where it juts in?”

“Yes. It has only been up there since the beginning of summer.”

“Good!” Carroll stared reflectively at the little electric buttons, and then allowed his eyes to rove about the walls. “Is there any other electric switch in this room?”

“No—that is, I am pretty sure there isn’t.”

Carroll acted without speaking. With meticulous care, he searched the walls for signs of another electric control button. He found none. Nor was there any electrolier which might have furnished the light. Hall caught the trend of his interest and questioned him:

“Still harping on that sudden period of darkness?”

“Yes,” answered the detective briefly. “It strikes me as rather—er—peculiar.”

Having satisfied himself that there was no other electric switch in the room, Carroll walked to the middle and surveyed the scene of the killing.

The room was a large one and very

handsomely furnished. In the centre was a massive mahogany table on which rested a bookrack fitted with legal tomes, volumes of essays, and the better class of literature. On either side of the table were heavy Spanish-leather chairs. On the west side of the room, toward the front of the house and about the middle of the wall, a door opened into the library immediately opposite the dining-room door. In addition to the French window opening on the L of the veranda, there was another window on the southern side of the room, then a big double door—open—and a third French window. The three windows were draped with heavy opaque portières. The portières covering the two windows near the L of the veranda were held back by silken cords; those nearest the library were hanging straight down. Between the corner window and the dining-room door stood an ornate but extremely handsome Japanese screen. To this Carroll

made his way. A careful examination disclosed a bullet hole in the screen. He rose and measured.

“Just about high enough for a bullet coming through to have hit Hartigan in the wrist,” he observed. “This is quite evidently the screen behind which Hartigan was hidden. The blood traces are still here. His story holds good as to those features. Now let’s see where Hamilton fell.”

They found the spot on the other side of the room near the library door, carefully marked out in chalk and identified by the bloodstains.

“That tallies, too,” said Hall. “Especially with the stories told by Hartigan and Mr. Harrelson. See, the drawer of the centre table is open; that’s where both men say the revolver came from.”

“If you will, Mr. Hall, step behind that screen and look at me as I stand here. See if you can discern me through the screen.”

Hall did as bidden and returned in a minute.

"I could see you, but only faintly. The screen is nearly opaque, but the bright light from the chandelier makes vision possible here."

"Could you see well enough to aim accurately?"

"I'm not a good shot. Try it yourself."

Carroll stepped behind the screen after placing Hall in the spot where Hamilton fell. He found that he could see the police commissioner's figure as though in silhouette, yet clearly enough for him to have shot through the screen with a more than even chance of hitting his mark.

"And," he remarked, half to himself, as he came from behind the screen, "Doctor Robinson was convinced that the bullet which killed Hamilton came from a distance of twenty or twenty-five feet—or more."

He continued his inspection of the room.

Its two pedestals with their burdens of handsome statuary; the well-filled bookcases; the three massive portraits in oil which decorated the tinted walls.

Then he crossed the room and entered the library. Hall followed and snapped on the switch near the door. The room, while not as handsomely furnished as the living room, was none the less attractive, mahogany and dull green throughout. The walls, from floor to ceiling, were lined with bookcases. It was quite evident that the array of books in the living room merely represented the overflow from the library. The centre table in the library, while massive, was different from that in the living room. While the latter was an ornamental table, the former was strictly utilitarian—a reading table with bookshelves built into the ends and a magazine rack for a base. The chairs in the room were deeply upholstered, the ornamentation sparse but effective. The room, as

did the other, denoted the quintessence of good taste. As in the living room, the library's walls were bedecked with three oil portraits.

There were four windows in the library; a French window similar to those in the living room giving out onto the veranda and three smaller windows overlooking the big lawn which gently sloped to the tree-lined avenue a hundred yards or so before it. There were two doors, the one through which the men had entered from the living room and another opposite the French window. To this Carroll led the way.

He opened it and stepped into the long hall, in which a dimmed electric bulb was glowing. They made their way down the hall, past a flight of steps, to another door. Carroll opened that, and, as he expected, found that it gave into the living room—the room in which Hamilton had been killed. A third door farther down the hall

opened into the dining room, a fourth into the butler's pantry, and a fifth into the kitchen.

The construction of the house on the other side of the hall was very similar, although there was no veranda. The parlour was opposite the library at the front of the house, and behind it the billiard room then the storeroom, and behind that the summer kitchen. Carroll questioned idly:

"Hamilton employed how many servants?"

"Three—exclusive of Mrs. Faber; cook, a maid for Miss Eunice, and a butler."

"What do you know about them?"

"Nothing much. The cook has been with Hamilton for years. The maid have seen here for two years at least. The butler I believe is a newcomer of the last few weeks. He's a stranger to me, at any rate."

"I'd like to speak to the maid," the detective announced. "I'm still puzzled over that sudden darkness and the fact that we know three revolvers were fired and yet the people concerned say that there were only two shots. It's possible that one of the domestics can throw a little light on that phase of the case. Call Rafferty from the parlour, will you?"

Hall was back in a minute with a big, strapping young policeman in tow. He was introduced to Carroll as the man in charge of the case.

"You've been here from the first, Rafferty?"

"Yis, sor."

"Have you searched the house?"

"Yis, sor; with the help av Mrs. Faber, sor."

"A thorough search?"

The officer flushed slightly.

"Not pwhat ye might call a *thorough* search, sor. There didn't seem to be

nothin' special to look for, an' we just looked in the rooms kind of general-like. Chief Rollins bein' in charge av the case, sor, it seemed like all he wanted us to do was to watch ginerally an' leave the close hunt to him—for clues and suchlike things. That bein' the case, sor, an' Mrs. Faber bein' in a hurry an' all excited up, we didn't go pokin' around too close."

"Very good. And now I want to find out something about the servants. Where is the cook?"

"She's gone for the night, sor. Mrs. Faber said it was her night off."

"Call the maid, then—it isn't her night off, is it?"

"No, sor; that's pwhat made Mrs. Faber so mad, sor."

"What is?"

"The maid isn't here, sor."

"What do you mean, isn't here?"

"Just that, sor. Mrs. Faber said she must have taken French leave. She

hunted for her, but she's gone, sor. Nobody has seen her since the shooting."

"I see. Well, the butler. Where is he?"

"That's another funny thing," announced Rafferty calmly. "The butler has disappeared, too, sor!"

CHAPTER VII

CARROLL slowly drew from pocket a pipe and a sack of bacco. He filled the bowl and tamped it down; then, with a deliberat which played on Hall's nerves, lightec and puffed a half dozen times.

"Explain it, Rafferty!" he command

"It's this way, sor. Whin Chief av l tectives Rollins gets out here, he te phones back to headquarters for Serg O'Brien to send out three men. I'm s out here at wanst with Officers Shorter & Weaver. Whin we get here, Rollins' t men is in the paytrol wagon outside, he tells us to watch, two outside an' t inside, an' to allow no wan but the pol departmint to enter.

"We ask him who is in the house, an' says no wan excipt Mrs. Faber, the hou

keeper, an' that she will soon be l'avin for p'lice headquarters, him not sayin' why. He says that it is the cook's night off, an' whin I ask him about the other servants he says he knows nothing about thim, ixcept that Mrs. Faber has towld him that they've disappeared. 'They probably heard the shootin',' he says to me, just like that, 'an' got scared an' beat it.' Then he goes away in the paytrol with the other fellers an' I'm left here.

"After a time Mrs. Faber comes down ready to leave, an' I ask her is she sure the house is empty. She looks at me kinder funny, an' is afther sayin' to me, just like this: 'I don't know what to make of these terrible doin's. Mither Hamilton is kilt dead an' the butler an' the maid have disappeared.' 'Disappeared?' I questions. 'Pwhat are ye afther meanin' be that, ma'am?' An' she looks at me like I was goin' to do her hurt, an' says to me, just like this: 'I mane pwhat I say. They've

gone. 'Twas the cook's night out, but the maid and the butler should have been in their rooms, which same they ain't. Oh, dearie me, I don't know pwhat to make av it!' And thin she went away, sor, in a taxicab which she had called.

"Them may not have been her ixact worruds, sor; but it was about that way. She looked terribly cut up an' flustered. An' that's all, sor; ixcipt that I took it to mesilf to search the house pretty thorough, an' I don't be afther findin' no wan. An' that's all there is to it."

Carroll nodded briefly.

"Thanks, Rafferty. You've done very well. Just remain on duty with Weaver and Shorter and carry out Chief Rollins' instructions. You may go."

He walked back into the living room with Commissioner Hall at his heels. The commissioner sank weakly into a chair.

"This investigation almost terrifies me,"

said Hall a bit nervously. "The more we investigate the farther away we get from a solution. Every place we look, every question we ask, develops some new ramification which bewilders me more. What do *you* make of these disappearances?"

"It's hard to say, Mr. Hall. It might mean something and it might be free from any significance."

"Damned rot! Begging your pardon, Carroll. But you know it is. You certainly don't take any stock in Rollins' haphazard guess that they got frightened at the sound of shooting and ran away?"

"No-o! I don't believe I do. However, anything is possible."

Hall snapped the end of a big cigar.

"Sometimes, Carroll, you get on my nerves. You talk a heap, but you say nothing. Why can't you tell me what you think?"

"Because," explained Carroll simply, "two minds are better than one. You

flatter me by having a pretty good opinion of my ability as a detective. Very well, it follows logically from that premise that if I told you what I suspected you would lose your individuality of thought—and that is the last thing in the world I desire. It might be that I am on the wrong track altogether, and that your mind will strike the correct solution. Talk it over with me as much as you like, but please don't ask me to tell you what I think; it would spoil you as a co-worker."

"But you *do* suspect something? You have formulated an idea as to who did the killing?"

"To be quite honest, I have not. I started off with an idea which, for a long time, stubbornly refused to be dismissed, but circumstance has piled on circumstance so that I am now almost convinced that my first idea was absurd. You see, we're working reverse English on this case—in-
stead of trying to fasten the guilt on one of

three suspects, we're trying to remove it from two of them; perhaps from all three and——”

“Meaning that you think Hartigan might have done it?”

“*Might* have—certainly. He admits enough to make that more than a possibility, and I am inclined to consider Hartigan seriously, because he is the one suspect who denies his guilt. And now”—he rose and stretched himself—“it is after two o'clock. Let's run back to headquarters and see if Mr. Denson has materialized, and if he has anything to say. And if not—a little sleep will be better for all of us. Come!”

As they started down the walk, Hall spoke:

“What do you intend to do next?”

“That depends absolutely on circumstances. If nothing changes my mind in the meanwhile, I shall sleep at headquarters and tomorrow morning make a trip

here with Badger—alone and secretly. I shall have Badger enact his story in that room. Then I shall have him held and bring Miss Duval, Mr. Harrelson, and Red Hartigan down and let them tell their stories separately. I want you here with me. And now”—he swung open the door and leaped into the passenger’s seat while Hall pressed the starter—“let’s make speed.”

The journey back to the police station was made without regard to traffic regulations. They shot down one street and up another at more than thirty-five miles an hour, and at length pulled up sharply in the glare of the arc light over the portals of the police building. They entered headquarters. Sergeant O’Brien came forward and touched his cap.

“Mr. Denson, sir, is waiting for Mr. Hall.”

“Where?”

“In the men’s rest room, sir.”

"Very good, sergeant. Nothing else new?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Chief Rollins has not interviewed the prisoners?"

"No, sir; he's already turned in for the night."

"Very good. That will do."

Hall led the way into the rest room, where, an hour and a half before, they had interviewed Rollins and Hartigan. As they entered the lawyer rose and came forward to greet them, his forehead puckered for a moment with doubt, and then clearing as he recognized David Carroll.

He was a sharp-eyed, competent-looking man of medium height and build. He had the habit of gazing at one levelly from behind tortoise-rimmed goggles which somehow managed to impart to his visage a hawklike cast. His manner of speech was sharp to a fault; he did not waste words—and yet, despite a natural reserve,

he was patently overwrought by the events of the night.

“Mr. Hall,” he said, as he extended his hand, “I can’t tell you how glad I am that you are here. And Mr. Carroll——” He paused interrogatively.

“Is in absolute charge of the case.”

“I’m glad of that. I know it is in good hands.”

The two men shook hands, and Hall stared at them curiously.

“I didn’t know that you knew one another, Denson.”

Denson nodded.

“Carroll has been working for Hamilton on that civic case. Met him at Hamilton’s office two or three times.”

“I see. And now, Denson—what?”

Denson looked first at one and then at the other. It was plain that he was a bit afraid—that he was weighing his words carefully. Carroll interpreted his silence.

“I know you’re wondering about Miss

Duval, Mr. Denson. Let me say right here that we know everything that she has to say—except the details. I will also tell you everything else we know about the case—” and he launched into a recital of the confession of the girl, the young artist—Harrelson; of Badger, and of the capture of Hartigan by Rollins; of their visit to the house, and of the mysterious disappearance of both the maid and the butler.

“I’m telling you all this,” he finished, “because we wish to enlist your aid. You were the lawyer of the dead man and are the attorney for Miss Duval, his ward——”

“And for Vincent Harrelson.”

“A-a-h! I didn’t know that.”

“Yes, the lad has been a sort of protégé of mine, which was one bone of contention between Mr. Hamilton and myself.”

“Mr. Hamilton disliked him keenly, did he not?”

The gazes of the two men clashed.

“How far can I trust myself to tell the truth, Carroll?”

“This far: I have made you the third person to possess the full knowledge of the case. That I have done it with a reason goes without saying, and basically that reason is that we need your help to get at the bottom of the matter. Being a lawyer, you know two things; one, that it would be hard for any jury to convict Miss Duval of the crime if she says anything at all in her own defence—no matter how slightly extenuating the circumstances might have been. Secondly, if Harrelson’s story is *true*, it was a clear case of self-defence. Therefore, you see that if either or both is telling the truth all we have to do to clear them is to find out which is which. It is obvious that only one person killed Hamilton; and, according to their stories, either will be cleared. Mind you, I am saying

their stories are true—and always provided that if Miss Duval did it that it was not clear murder!”

“Carroll,” broke in Hall sharply, “that’s horrible! You know——”

“I know nothing! I am laying the cards on the table face up for Mr. Denson to play or not, as he sees fit. I tell you this, Denson—I have trusted you this far: no one save you, Mr. Hall, and myself know anything about Badger’s connection with the case. He is the trump card that I am keeping from the police department. I have him under the private surveillance of a member of the force who is a very particular friend of mine, and who can be trusted implicitly to carry out my orders. It would bother me considerably if the police department—meaning Collins, who is in charge of the case for it—knew of Badger’s story or of his confession. I’ve played straight across the

board; are you going to help Mr. Hall and myself, knowing that we're driving at the strict truth, or are you going to trust your single wits to clear your clients without help?"

"Give me a minute, Carroll." The lawyer rose and stepped to the window. For perhaps five minutes he stood motionless. Then he turned on his heel and came back to the table. His hand went out and gripped Carroll's. "If you and Hall are not on the level, Carroll, then neither one is. In some cases a man has to take his chance. I'm taking mine here and now with you. I promise to withhold nothing—however damning it may seem."

"Good! I expected as much, Mr. Deason. And now let's sit down and talk the thing over. In the first place, you have never answered my question; did Hampton dislike Harrelson very keenly?"

"Yes."

"Did he hate him?"

Denson flushed slightly.

"Mr. Hamilton was a man of powerful passions. I believe he did."

"And you say that Harrelson was a protégé of yours; what was his attitude toward Hamilton?"

"He——" Denson broke off shortly. "Dammit all, sir, I'm trusting you with a great deal of information! However—well, Harrelson is an impulsive, headstrong youth, and he detested Mr. Hamilton."

"Have you any theories as to the reason?"

"Yes—but they are theories."

"We would like to know them."

"Vincent Harrelson is secretly engaged to Miss Duval. He had a wild idea that Mr. Hamilton was in love with her himself, and wished to marry her."

"I see. And now this: In your opinion, is Vincent Harrelson the type of young man to have shouldered the bur-

den of Miss Duval's guilt, provided he is convinced that she is guilty of the killing?"

Denson pondered.

"I believe he is, but I am not sure. The boy's one weakness is a lack of decision. I should say, too, that he has a selfish trait. On the other hand, I would volunteer the opinion that if he had really committed the crime and knew that Miss Duval were suspected he would confess his guilt."

"Good! That's fine! You have talked with Miss Duval, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe she shot Hamilton?"

"I can't answer that—really."

"Please. I assure you we are as anxious to clear Miss Duval as you can possibly be."

"I believe you are. Well, foolish as it may be for me to confess it, *I really believe Miss Duval shot Mr. Hamilton!*"

There was a long silence, punctured

only by the insistent ticking of the clock. Denson mopped a perspiring forehead.

"I've never done such a damnably fool thing in my life!" he burst out. "It—it's —unprofessional, unethical. Miss Duval is my client. Mr. Harrelson is my friend as well as my client. And——"

"We are your friends, too," said Hall softly. "We must get at the truth some way—you know that we will. The confession of either is all that a court needs. You are simply expediting matters."

Here Carroll broke in again:

"I want you to do something, Mr. Denson—to show you how we trust your alliance with us. Miss Duval knows nothing about Hartigan's implication in the case. Go to her and tell her that we have the man who committed the crime. Tell her that he is a notorious burglar who fired from behind the Japanese screen in the living room; that the circumstantial evidence is sufficient to send him to the electric chair.

Ask her whether she will not, in view of these new developments, withdraw her confession."

"That's white!" said Denson simply and left the room. For the following ten minutes Carroll smoked in silence. And then the door opened and Denson re-entered. He looked harried and worn.

"Well?"

"She said," replied Denson slowly, "that she doesn't care anything about Red Hartigan or any one else. She insists that *she* killed Mr. Hamilton!"

CHAPTER VIII

CARROLL did not raise his eyes from the table, and Hall, following his lead, remained silent. Denson, still a bit shaken, seated himself again, and at length the silence grew too much for him. "Well, what about it?" he rasped.

Hall looked toward Carroll.

"What about it?" he echoed.

Carroll shook his head.

"I don't know. What Mr. Denson tells me bears out my own theory to a certain extent."

"Which is——"

"That Miss Duval really thinks she killed Hamilton."

"But, good God," burst out Denson querulously, "don't you suppose that a person knows when he kills another?"

How can there be a doubt about a thing like that?"

"It was dark in that room," explained Carroll quietly, "for about six seconds. When we find out who turned off the lights and why, we'll be closer to a solution. Until then—well, there is one thing certain, more than one person fired."

"Yes," said Hall, "three fired. We have the three revolvers—Mr. Hamilton's, which both Miss Duval and Harrelson claim to have used; that of this man Hartigan, and Badger's. All are police revolvers."

"That's a rather far-fetched coincidence, isn't it?" questioned Denson.

"Ye-e-s; but so is the triple shooting. I gave Hamilton his weapon some time ago; he had a ridiculous, rusty old .32 which I used to joke him about. One day he jocularly remarked that if I didn't like it I could give him another, and that's how he happened to get a regulation revolver.

I liked it and bought one. Badger bought his from a pawnshop where some policeman evidently pawned it in sudden need for money. And Hartigan——”

“And Hartigan?” prompted Carroll.

“Probably got his from a pawnshop, too, knowing that it is an efficient weapon. It’s funny, though——”

“Damned funny!” snapped Denson. “Especially as only two shots were fired. How do you tally that with the three empty revolvers?”

“There are two solutions,” replied Carroll deliberately. “The first is that two shots were fired simultaneously—or so closely together that the reverberation in this room caused the hearers to think that it was one shot; the second following right afterward. The other solution is that—*only two shots were fired!*”

“Only two shots? We have the three revolvers.”

Carroll smiled.

"That is only an idea, probably absurd. My first theory may be the correct one. But we'll take that up later. Meanwhile, Mr. Denson, didn't I understand that you visited Hamilton tonight?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"The call was partly social and partly a business affair. The business end of it had to do with some affidavits I was getting for him in this Civic League work. And after what I saw there tonight I am trebly unable to believe that Miss Duval shot him."

"There was no trouble between Mr. Hamilton and Miss Duval tonight?"

"Nothing unusual. She has never liked him. What I'm driving at is Badger."

"What about Badger?"

"The truth of the story he tells. You see, gentlemen, I was there when Badger threatened to kill Hamilton!"

"A-a-h!" Carroll leaned forward eagerly. "You hadn't mentioned that."

"I've been trying to sift things for myself; trying to know what facts to tell and what to conceal. Now, since I'm telling everything—both helpful and detrimental to my clients—I may as well tell what happened when I visited there tonight."

"Y-e-s," said Carroll, "please."

"I had telephoned Mr. Hamilton that I was coming down with those affidavits to talk things over with him. Shortly after I got there—and up to that time our talk had been purely social—Miss Duval came in. She was in evening dress, just as she is now. We rose, and Hamilton asked her where she was going. She replied that she was going out with Harrelson. Hamilton flushed and reminded her that he had forbidden Harrelson to the house. She flared up, trying not to show it too much before me, and said that she was over twenty-one years of age and

would not be dictated to. Hamilton replied that he didn't care to discuss the matter, but that he did not intend to have Harrelson visit the house nor allow her to go out with him. She swept out of the room, furiously angry.

"When she had gone, I asked Hamilton why he was so hard on the boy. 'Denson,' he said quietly, 'you cannot understand. You may think it is—oh, any one of several things! You look at Harrelson through rose-coloured glasses. You like him for the very things I dislike in him. He is idealistic and impractical. He makes a pittance with his daubing, and will not work for a living. Why should I stand by and see such a girl throw herself away on that sort of man? I don't like him personally; but if he was half a man I wouldn't stand in their way. But, by God,' and he slammed his fist on the table, 'so long as he remains as worthless as he is I'll keep him out of this house, no matter

to what lengths I'm forced! I assumed responsibility with that girl, and I'll shoulder it in full.'

"It was, gentlemen," continued Denson, "a rather embarrassing subject to me and to him. Especially as he knew that I am very fond of the lad and am familiar with his impulsive, headstrong nature. So I tried to turn the subject back to the Civic Reform League work. Just as we got launched on that there were loud voices in the hall, and finally the butler entered."

"The butler?" questioned Hall interestedly.

"Donaldson, his name is," replied Denson. "I think he has only been with Hamilton a few weeks. Anyway, Donaldson said that there was a little man who acted very peculiarly and insisted on seeing Hamilton; that he thought it was the man whom Hamilton had given him orders not to admit, but that he had forced his way into the house. Hamilton shrugged and

told Donaldson to let the man in. The man was Badger."

"You know something of his past dealings with Badger—as his lawyer?" questioned Carroll.

"Yes. It dates back fully fifteen years. Badger, I take it, was one of those failures who have squandered a life looking for sudden riches. It seems that fifteen years or so ago some one took him in with a sale of oil lands. Badger sunk all his money—and he had several thousand dollars—in the purchase of these lands. He came to Hamilton—you know Hamilton has always had a weakness for listening to wild-cat schemes—and convinced him that he—Badger—had sunk every dollar into the scheme. He wanted money to develop the land, and Hamilton reasoned, against my advice, that if Badger believed in it sufficiently to put in all of his money, Hamilton might take a chance.

"So Hamilton sent experts down to in-

investigate. They reported, as I remember it, that there was oil in the land, but that there was small likelihood of striking sufficient of it to make drilling operations worth while. Against their advice and against mine, he sank about twenty thousand dollars in it. A company was incorporated with Hamilton holding fifty-one per cent. of the stock and Badger forty-nine per cent. After spending all that money and getting almost no oil, Hamilton quit.

“Badger, meanwhile, had seen visions of millions. I believe he was always half-cracked. He insisted that Hamilton was trying to wrest all the land from him before working it; ridiculous logic as it was, Hamilton could never convince him that the proposition was really a failure. Badger has hounded the man for fifteen years, demanding back his land or his money. And Hamilton, gentlemen, was scrupulous to a fault in business matters.

He refused point-blank. That was his way, and he could not be blamed. He had invested twenty thousand dollars in the scheme. At any rate, the idea that Hamilton had robbed him of a fortune became a monomania with Badger. It has been growing worse and worse. Hamilton has tried every method of pacifying him, but the development of the mania has been shown by Badger's increasingly ridiculous demands—he recently had been insisting that Hamilton pay him twenty-five thousand dollars! Absurd, of course.

“Until a couple of months ago Hamilton has been indulgent, has loaned the man money which he knew would never be returned, and has always granted him an audience. But the man's wild-eyed vituperation got on his nerves, and for some time he has refused to see him. I can produce a dozen witnesses—lawyers, most of them—to whom Badger has gone

for advice, and in whose presence he has threatened Hamilton's life.

"He came into the room and Hamilton dismissed Donaldson. And, gentlemen, if ever I saw the light of insanity in a man's eyes, it was in Badger's. He talked incoherently and made wild gestures. He cursed Hamilton in the worst billingsgate. And Hamilton grew angry. He ordered the man out of the house. With that Badger waved his arms and shrieked 'You'll be sorry! You'll be sorry for this, you bloodsucker! You'd better pay me—or I'll kill you!'

"Hamilton rose. 'Get out of here—and get quick!' he snapped.

" 'I'll kill you!'

" 'Get out!'

"Badger turned to me. 'You heard me warn him!' he said levelly. 'You heard me!'

" 'Don't be a fool, Badger,' I said

kindly, rather sorry for the crazy old fellow. 'You'll get yourself in trouble.' Hamilton swung on me.

" 'This is my affair, Denson. I've stood all I'm going to stand from this man. I'm done with him.' Then he called Donaldson and Badger left—meekly enough and without further threats. When he had gone, Hamilton laughed shortly.

" 'He carried it too far tonight,' he remarked. 'I'm through with him.' And then we both put the incident aside, reckoning Badger a crazy man and one not to be feared. And that is all there is to my story. I left a few minutes later, before Harrelson arrived. I went to his boarding house, thinking to find him there and ask him not to go to Hamilton's home. But when I got there he had gone, and I forgot the whole thing until I heard the news of Hamilton's death and the request that I come to see Miss Duval at the station here."

There was a minute of silence. And then Hall broke it:

“That story tallies perfectly with Badger’s.”

“Yes,” agreed Carroll. “Almost too well. The farther we get into the case the more convinced we become that three of our four possibilities killed Hamilton—it is certain that the story of either Miss Duval or this chap Harrelson is untrue. We know that only one of them actually did it.”

There came a discreet rap at the door, and in response to Hall’s response Sergeant Larry O’Brien entered. In his hands he carried copies of the two morning newspapers.

“I was afther thinkin’ ye’d loike to see pwhat the papers have to say about the murder, sors.” He extended the dailies to Hall.

“Thanks, Larry.”

The men grouped about the table and

Hall spread the *News* face upward. Seven-column headlines screamed the news of the sensational murder in forty-eight-point type. They glanced through the article swiftly and Carroll smiled.

"Barrett Rollins engineered the reporters cleverly," he remarked, after glancing at the other paper. "Not a word about either Miss Duval or Mr. Harrelson." He turned to O'Brien. "Did Chief Rollins leave any instructions regarding the news to be given to reporters?" he asked.

"Sure an' he did, sor. He said that no wan on the force was to say a worrud about Miss Duval or the young gintleman, sor. Though 'tis my opinion that 'twill leak out and be in the avenin' papers tomorry."

"How about your docket? Aren't their names entered here?"

"Only Hartigan's, sor. The others have been kept on private memorandum."

"Good! Keep it mum as long as you can."

The stories of the two newspapers tallied as to facts, although they varied as to floridity of style. Both told of the killing, mentioned Red Hartigan as the murderer, described the finding of the evidence by the wonderful efforts of Chief of Detectives Rollins, and wound up with a statement that police headquarters refused to allow them to interview the man. There was no mention of any other person in the case. Separate stories in both newspapers were devoted to Hartigan's lurid criminal record and to Edward J. Hamilton's life.

"So far so good," said Carroll, folding his paper and stuffing it in his coat pocket. "That was a very wise move Rollins made, although I'm very much afraid we shall not be able to keep Miss Duval's name out of the public prints. At any rate—we'll try. The evening papers will have more time to work the story. And now—I think a little sleep will do us all good. As for me, I'll have a cot brought in here."

"And I," remarked Hall, "will remain with you."

"I'll go home," said Denson, "with the express understanding that I'm to be called if needed."

"Good!" They rose and shook hands. As they started toward the door it opened and Larry O'Brien poked his head in.

"Beg pardon, sors, but Red Hartigan is begging hard to see Mr. Hall. He says he has a confession to make."

Hall turned away abruptly. Denson stared in petrified amazement. Only Carroll retained his facial composure and ordered the man brought in.

"Good Lord!" gasped Hall. "Is it possible that this man, too, is about to tell us that he murdered Hamilton?"

"I hope so," said Denson briefly. "I'd like to believe that he did it."

Hartigan was brought before them and O'Brien dismissed with orders to wait just outside the door, and to allow no one to

enter. The man's face was set with the pain of his injured wrist, and he stared at the trio defiantly.

"I'd like to spill this to you *two*," he said significantly. He was plainly nonplussed at Denson's presence. Carroll reassured him:

"You wanted to tell us——"

"I been thinkin' it over," said Hartigan, "an' it struck me that I'm in a pretty bad way in this mess. I didn't kill the ol' duck—so help me! I didn't—an' I gets to thinkin' to meself that if you was to find out I lied about somethin' you'd think I lied about the whole thing, so I've come to make a clean breast."

"You mean you killed Hamilton?" burst out Hall.

"Na-a! I don't mean nothin' of the kind. The story I told you was true s' far's it went. But there was one thing I didn't mention." He paused.

"Which was?" prompted Carroll.

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“You remember,” continued the big man, “that I told you the lights went off just before I was shot?”

“Yes.”

“Well—what I didn’t tell you was this:
I’m the man that turned them off!”

CHAPTER IX

FOR the first time since assuming charge of the case, David Carroll exhibited stark surprise. And no wonder—for all of Carroll's theories regarding the shooting had been predicated on the sudden extinguishing of the lights. And here, by a word, Red Hartigan, burglar, knocked the foundation from under his carefully builded case.

Nor did he conceal his surprise; the look of dismay on his face caused Hall to chuckle grimly.

"At least you're human, Carroll. Heretofore, I've been the one to gape at news."

"It is rather—er—bewildering," said Carroll, after a short pause for the selection of the most apt word. Then, regain-

ing his poise and clipping off his words incisively, he swung on Hartigan.

"Hartigan," he said, "you are confessedly a crook and a liar. Are you telling the truth now, or did some one get to you?"

The big man was plainly puzzled.

"Get to me? How could any one do that? Ain't I been under guard, huh? What I'm tellin' you now is the Gawd's truth; you can take it or leave it, but all the clever prosecutin' attorneys in the world can't shake my story now—because it's true."

"Tell us about it."

"It's just like I told you afore. I was making a get-away with the boodle, and I come into the room from the dinin' room, where I'd copped some silver for good measure. The room was all lit up, an', thinkin' I heard the sound of a scrap in the next room, I hopped behind the screen. It was pretty dark back there, an' I knowed they'd never spot me, an' I could see sorter

hazylike through—the light bein' on that side.

“Then I was sure there was men quarrellin', an' all of a suddint a girl comes from behind the portières over the big winder on the other side of the door leadin' to the porch—the one leadin' to the next room—opens an' the big guy an' the little feller come out, fightin'. The little man makes a grab for a paper weight or somethin', an' the big feller gets it away. That's where I begin to think it's a swell chancst for me to make my get-away while everything's excitement. Of course I've spotted the switch right near the screen—so I says to meself, why not switch 'em all off, make a break through the winder behind me, which is half open, an' beat it? They don't know I'm there, y'see, an' they'd never suspect nothin'. An' my pal's waitin' in the garden yonder, an' th' other feller is goin' out the front door; two of us havin' been workin' inside an' one outside.

"I keep me eyes sharp on the scrap, an', believe me, they're goin' to it! Just as I reach out for the switch I see the little feller grab a gun outa th' table drawer, an' th' big man knocks it outa his hand. They all make a dive for it, big feller, little feller, an' th' girl. I snap off the light—flooie! just like that.

"Just then there's two shots; where from, I don't know. I feel this pain, hot an' burnin'like, in my hand, an' I know a bullet's got me. But I know that there wasn't no one shootin' at me. Then I get sick all of a sudden, an' I know I'm gonna fall. Well, I thinks, if I fall down they'll come over to switch on th' lights, an' they'll spot me. So I reaches over, snaps 'em on again, an' lays meself down. Next I know Rollins has me in the horspital. An' that's all."

"No, that's not *all*."

"S'help me, it is."

"Listen to common sense, Hartigan.

.You know as well as I do that we've got you dead to rights with enough evidence to hang you higher than a kite. Now come clean, and maybe we'll see our way to letting you off on a burglary charge without mentioning murder. Who were your pals?"

A peculiar look flashed into the burglar's eyes.

"You ain't no reg'lar bull, are youse, boss?"

"No. Why?"

"Because," answered the man with quiet dignity, "if you was you'd know better than to ask Red Hartigan to squeal on a pal!"

Carroll pondered. Here he was balked in this new line of search by a cul-de-sac of a crook's honour; a man who would steal and who would lie, but who steadfastly refused to violate the one immutable tenet of his profession—a man who would not squeal. Carroll nodded briefly:

"That's all; you can go back to your cell."

Hartigan started forward.

"I want you to b'lieve what I tol' ye, boss. It's the honest-t'-Gawd truth and——"

"I've doubted the truth from lips of better men than you, Hartigan." He opened the door. "O'Brien!"

"Yis, sor." The head of the sergeant appeared as though by magic.

"Take this man back to his cell and see to it that he talks to no one—except, of course, Chief Rollins."

"About reporters, sor?"

"Not a word is to be said to any one of them. We'll give them the story in time. And when you're relieved in the morning tell Ryall—he's day sergeant, isn't he?"

"Yis, sor, he is."

"What you know of the case; and give him the same orders I've given you. That's all."

At the door, Hartigan turned.

"I ain't used to you fancy bulls," he shot vindictively at Carroll. "A reg'lar one would know when I was tellin' the truth. I've said all I got to say—an' be damned to you!"

The door closed behind sergeant and prisoner. It was Denson who questioned Carroll first.

"Do you believe his story?"

"As much as I believe any story I have heard so far. But it is a dangerous thing to believe the word of that type of man. They're uncannily clever at simulation of innocence, and he, knowing nothing else of the case, feels that his neck is in a noose. And he's liable to think up a mighty clever story."

"And you mustn't forget," reminded Hall, "that a revolver, with one chamber exploded, was found in his coat pocket."

Denson shook his head.

"The whole thing is beyond me. I'd

better be going home. Remember, you gentlemen have both promised to telephone me if there are any new developments."

They saw him out, and then returned to the rest room, where they had two regulation iron cots brought down and made up. They left instructions with O'Brien that they were to be called on the slightest provocation, and gradually they dropped off to sleep.

Hall was the first to wake. For a minute he stared blinkingly at his unusual surroundings, and then, slowly, recollection of the kaleidoscopic happenings of the previous night returned to his mind. In the cold, sober light of early morning, the events following Hamilton's killing seemed like a horrible nightmare from which one must waken slowly.

He lay on his cot and stared at the sombre ceiling of the headquarters' rest room. Once he heard some one try the knob and

the voice of a policeman, evidently on special duty, warning the would-be intruder that he'd get busted high as Haman if he butted in on the police commissioner.

He could hear a buzzing of conversation in the hall outside, then the heavy tread of many feet on the stairs, followed by silence; then a sharp barking of answers as the day sergeant called the roll of the new patrol; then the incisive commands for inspection, and finally the opening of the street door and the solemn filing out of the uniformed guardians of the city's peace. All in a day's work to these men—tragedies such as that of the previous night. The latest was more sensational, perhaps, and rather closer to the bosom of the police department; but murder, robbery—nothing for a professional policeman to lose his head over.

He turned on his side, and his eyes rested on the figure of David Carroll. For a second he winked unbelievably—it

was incomprehensible that the smooth, slender, boyish face on the cot beside his belonged to one of the best detectives in the country; a man gentle of manner and modest of demeanour; fair to a fault, and with a code of honour as rigid and unshakable as the Rock of Gibraltar; a man who faced the worst risks cheerfully and quietly; who, in the midst of excitement, kept his head where others lost theirs—weighing, always weighing, fact and circumstance, person and personality.

Carroll smiled gently in his sleep; his face that of a dreamer, rather ascetic in the rigidity of some lines and poetic in the softness of others. Yet that was the man who, with some, the night before, had been austere, commanding, domineering almost; with others patient to a degree, tactful, retiring.

Of a sudden Carroll was awake. He rubbed his knuckles into his eyes, sat up in bed, and smiled cheerily at Hall. From

the instant that his lids popped open there was no hint of bewilderment in his manner; rather, there was an almost uncanny righting of himself to surroundings.

“How do you do it?” asked Hall.

“What?”

“Remember it all—on the instant?”

“It’s my profession,” answered Carroll simply.

He leaped nimbly from the bed, slipped the length of the rest room, where he cracked open a door, took a careful survey, and motioned Hall to follow him into the shower room. The police commissioner satisfied himself with a warm spray, but Carroll ignored the handle marked “Hot” and stepped under the icy cascade with a grunt of satisfaction.

His skin glowed pinkly in the morning light, and the easy-writhing play of his muscles under the satiny flesh gave an impression of physical strength which his clothes hid completely. And finally they

were dressed and munching a coarse breakfast served them by the barracks' chef. That finished, they lighted cigars and seated themselves in the rest room. Carroll came straight to the point:

"Three of the best detectives I know will be here this morning to help me. One of them will be placed in charge of Miss Duval, one of Harrelson, and one of Badger. Hartigan I will leave to the tender mercies of the police department. Hello, Denson—you're early!"

Denson shook hands briefly.

"Didn't know I had nerves," he grunted, "but last night made things seem creepy. Couldn't sleep—worse luck. Took a cold dip and came on down. Anything new?"

"Nothing. Have you had breakfast?"

"Coffee and rolls; didn't want anything else. What's first on the program?"

"To the house with Badger." Carroll

glanced out of the window. "My men are coming now—good!"

Carroll's three men proved to be mild-mannered young giants of placid countenances. He introduced them briefly—Roberts, Smith, and Johnson, three men with whom, as he briefly explained, he had worked some of his most difficult cases; men who could be trusted absolutely to keep silent regarding what they knew and to ask no questions about what they didn't. He accompanied them from the room and assigned them to their tasks; Roberts as special custodian for Frederick Badger; Johnson to be with Eunice Duval, and Smith with Harrelson. No one was to speak to the prisoners, he informed them; least of all, Barrett Rollins. Then he spoke to Hall, had the commissioner's automobile—a touring car had been brought down in place of the roadster which still lay parked in the street—backed up

against the back door of headquarters, and within five minutes the car, containing Carroll, Roberts, Badger, Hall, and Denson, was speeding, with top up and curtains drawn, toward Hamilton's home.

Immediately on his arrival, Carroll summoned the three policemen who had maintained the night vigil at the house. In response to his query as to their physical condition, they confessed that they had divided the night into three watches, two sleeping at a time, so that they felt fairly fresh. Carroll stationed the trio at the two entrances to the ground with strict orders that no one, even from the police department, was to be admitted without first summoning him. Then the car purred into the spacious grounds, beautiful now in the bright sun of a clear, summer day. It stopped under the shadow of a spreading elm, and the passengers alighted.

Badger, small, insignificant looking, and a bit frightened at the secrecy which

had enshrouded their movements, glanced about apprehensively. Carroll spoke with him:

“You still stick to your story of last night, Mr. Badger?”

The little man looked at him out of his meek, mild, inquiring blue eyes.

“Why, yes; why shouldn’t I? It’s true.”

“I thought perhaps you’d like to retract your confession?”

“No-o. That wouldn’t be any use, would it?”

The man was pitiful; the watchers felt a profound sympathy for him. That such a meek man should have been inspired to deliberate murder—it was unbelievable that he was not mentally deficient.

“We’re going to do what we can for you, Mr. Badger,” said Carroll kindly. “Of course I can promise you nothing; if you are guilty, you must suffer. But, above all, you must be honest. What I want

you to do now is to re-enact the scene last night from the time you entered the grounds until you left them. Here"—he thrust into the little wizened hands an empty revolver, the very one Badger had used the previous night—"go right ahead, just as you did last night."

Badger gazed appealingly from one to the other.

"What's the use of it?" he questioned vaguely. "Haven't I told you I killed him?"

"Yes," said Carroll gently, "but we are rather puzzled about the case. There are three punishments for killing a man; the crime may be murder, it may be manslaughter, or it may be plain homicide—and the latter may be justifiable. We will watch you. You'll do it, won't you?"

"Yes," agreed the little old man timidly, "I'll do it, but I don't see what it's all about."

"It's to find out what you really did do."

"Very well." Badger clutched the revolver tightly in his *two* hands, a fact at which Carroll nodded significantly. Then, quite abruptly, his expression changed as he entered into the spirit of the play.

The benign, harmless look in his eyes gave way as he walked across the lawn to a crafty, foxlike, wholly demented expression. His little shoulders hunched, and he minced stealthily.

He led the way around to the rear of the house, walking rather pridefully, as though the dramatic elements of the pantomime, with himself in the centre of the stage, appealed to him. He indicated a broken place in the wall which fronted on the back street.

"I climbed over there," he chuckled foxily, "so that no one could see me."

He walked halfway to the wall and then whirled.

“When I got to here,” he explained, “I got down on my hands and knees—so.”

Thereafter he acted without speaking. Slowly and quietly he crawled toward the rear of the house, pausing every minute or two to glance cautiously about. The revolver he had thrust into the pocket of his shiny old coat. The balmy breeze of the early morning ruffled the silky strands of snowy hair about his temples. Only the now bitter expression of his face was there to give plausibility to the fact that he was re-enacting a murder.

He approached the southeast corner of the house, flattened himself against the wall, and slipped quietly toward the southern side, where the long veranda spanned the length of the residence. Keeping in what must have been a dense shadow at night, he edged around the corner, and, without relaxing his vigilance, made his way past the kitchen and the butler's pantry toward the flight of steps leading to the

veranda at the place where the house jutted in, the space between dining room and living room.

Arriving at the steps, he dropped to all fours and crawled up, one by one. Carroll noticed that the screen at the corner of the veranda would have effectually shut off a view of him from any one who might have been in the garden. Followed by his breathless audience, the old man crept across the veranda, pausing long enough to pull the revolver from his pocket. At the big French window which faced east—toward the rear of the house—he began talking, low and sibilantly:

“I came up just like this—so. I noticed that there was a light in the room. I moved up to the window and looked in. I saw a girl—Mr. Hamilton’s girl, I think it was. I was afraid she would see me, so I moved away. I waited in the shadow of the screen there; then I heard the sounds of a quarrel. I slipped back to the win-

dow, being careful to stand in the shadow so that Hamilton would not see me and run away. I wanted to kill him.

“Every once in a while I could see the girl, and then I saw him fighting with another man——”

“Him?”

“Mr. Hamilton. I couldn’t see very plainly because that screen you see there cut off a part of my view. I didn’t want to shoot Hamilton while the young man was fighting with him, because I didn’t want to kill anybody but Hamilton. Then all of a sudden he rushed away from the man he was fighting with and tore open the drawer of that table yonder.” Badger’s voice rose shrilly; he was working himself into a state of intense excitement—his little figure quivered with emotion. “He opened the drawer and pulled out a revolver. I thought that he saw me—so I raised the revolver like this”—he lifted the weapon, still clutching it in both

hands, and half closed his eyes—"and took careful aim. And then I pulled the trigger, but just as I did all the lights went out. I shot!" He paused and stood trembling.

"Then the lights went on again! I saw Hamilton falling—and I knew—I knew I had killed him, and I was glad, glad! He'd stolen my money and ruined my life. I had warned him, warned him a dozen times, but he wouldn't believe me."

Carroll touched him soothingly on the arm.

"That's all right, Mr. Badger. Now tell us what you did after you pulled the trigger."

The little man looked up dazedly.

"I ran away. Just ran away, that's all. What else should I do? I went down to the police station and gave myself up."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I didn't care any more what they did with me. I was willing to die

now that I knew he was dead!" His eyes were flaming vindictively. "And I won't say I'm sorry, because I'm not. I was scared at first awful; the gun made a big noise, and it frightened me. And there were other people in the room, and I thought they'd catch me and hold me, and I wanted to give myself up so that every one would know the truth—would know that Hamilton's death had been the hand of justice—that's it, the hand of justice. This hand here—see?" He extended a skinny paw that trembled as though with palsy.

"Think carefully, Mr. Badger; did you hear another shot—just after the lights went on again?"

Badger passed a weak hand across his forehead. Under Carroll's soothing examination, he was recovering from the frenzy of passion which had gripped him a moment since.

“Another shot? I don’t know that I did.”

“Are you sure that you did *not*?”

“No, I’m not sure about anything. I wasn’t thinking about anything much except being glad that I’d killed Hamilton. I told him I was going to do it, and after I saw him falling I ran away. And I ain’t sorry for it, either; I ain’t going to say *that* if you hang me. I’m glad I killed him.”

“S-h-sh! Don’t get yourself worked up.”

“I—I—can’t help it when I think of that man—and what he did to me. You see, I ain’t been very well for a long time. I have headaches and such, and I don’t think of many things at a time. And,” with quaint dignity, “I guess that’s all, ain’t it, gentlemen?”

Carroll nodded.

“Yes, that’s all, Mr. Badger. Roberts!”

The young detective stepped forward.

"Yes, sir?"

"Take Mr. Badger to the automobile, and be sure that no one sees him. We'll join you in a minute."

"Very well, sir."

He touched Badger gently on the shoulder and they walked together; the big, broad-shouldered young detective in the prime of a perfect life and the wizened little old man long past the heyday of his. Hall swore sharply.

"If he killed him or not," he broke out violently, "he ought to get off! The old man is daffy; crazy as a loon! If I ever in my life saw a victim of a homicidal mania, he is it; don't you think so. Denson?"

Denson nodded slowly.

"I believe I do. And you, Carroll?"

Instead of answering, Carroll stepped through the opened French window into the room and moved to his right until he

stood behind the ornate Japanese screen in the shadow of which Rollins had found the unconscious form of Red Hartigan.

He inspected it carefully, occasionally turning to draw a bead from the spot from which Badger had fired to the place where the bullet hole showed. Finally he rejoined them.

"I don't think Badger will need an insanity defence," he announced quietly.

"Won't need—— Why? What do you mean?"

"I mean," explained Carroll simply, "that in so far as I can be positive of anything at this stage of the game, I am sure that Badger did *not* shoot Mr. Hamilton." He paused. Denson leaned forward tensely.

"Then what did he shoot?"

"Unless I am utterly mistaken," said the detective, "*Badger shot Red Hartigan!*"

CHAPTER X

I'LL tell you why I think Hartigan was shot by Badger," continued Carroll evenly. "You yourselves saw the man re-enact his part in last night's tragedy. I, for one, am anything but gullible, and I say frankly that I believe the man was telling the truth."

"And I," said Denson.

"Me, too," agreed Hall.

"So far so good. You also noticed that he handled his revolver with two hands. He is physically weak and puny. From the very way he handled the gun it was self-evident that he is not used to firearms. Why, then, suppose that his aim was so deadly accurate that he hit his target even in the dark? Revolver shooting is a difficult art at best, and it would be stretching

one's credulity to believe that he hit the man he was firing at, especially as Hartigan—so he says—had meanwhile snapped off the lights.

“But it is certain that he fired. Where, then, did his bullet go? Here.” He took his stand on the spot where Badger had stood and clutched the revolver in two hands, waving it as Badger had done. “If Harrelson and Hamilton had come through that door yonder they would have been visible beyond the left side of the screen. Badger already had his trigger back probably—his gun fired, and the bullet struck Hartigan. You can see the bullet hole beyond in the screen, just at the height of Hartigan's wrist, and I am pretty well convinced, after examining it again in the light of Badger's story, that the bullet which went through that screen was headed into the room—not toward the wall. What do you think, Mr. Hall?”

“I think you're dead right—and in so

far as that little old man is concerned I'm glad."

"And you, Denson?"

The lawyer pulled a wry face.

"Since I have agreed to be honest, I must admit that I agree with you—much as I hate to."

"Why?"

"With Badger eliminated, the burden of guilt is thrown on one of my two clients—Miss Duval or Mr. Harrelson."

"You forgot Hartigan," suggested Carroll.

"By George!" Hall broke out. "I *had* forgotten Hartigan! We've proved his story true up to the present; but, still, he might have shot Hamilton and thought that Hamilton shot him."

"He *might*, yes," agreed Carroll. "But one fact stands out with puzzling significance—it is agreed that no shot was fired before the lights went out, and it is a vir-

tual certainty that Hartigan was shot in the dark. Are we to believe, then, that he shot *after* switching the lights back on and after he had been wounded?"

"He fired a shot at some time!" snapped Denson bluntly. "We know that!"

"Yes," said Carroll, "so we do. I had forgotten that."

Hall flashed him a keen glance.

"What are you driving at, anyway, Carroll? Hartigan lied to us when he told his first story; he admitted it when he came in to see us at headquarters with his carefully thought-out revision. Rollins found Hartigan unconscious behind that screen; he found in his pocket a revolver from which one shot had been fired. His deductions were absolutely logical. Why should we believe every detail of the crook's story?"

"We shouldn't," said Carroll simply. "We shouldn't believe any one's story—even that of Miss Duval."

“Meaning?” interjected Denson eagerly.

“That, of our four choices, three are mistaken—either deliberately or through circumstances. Remember, this case reeks with the unusual; we have one of the most prominent men in the city murdered in his own study—and immediately following the murder the confessions of his ward, a society belle; a young artist, and a half-crazy old man. Then the head of our regular detective force brings in a burglar so tightly hemmed around with a net of circumstantial evidence that he wouldn’t have a breathing chance before a jury.

“A doctor’s investigation proves beyond peradventure of a doubt that the man was shot only once. And while every one present admits that three shots might have been fired—the likelihood is that there were only two; one fired in the dark, and the other immediately after the lights were snapped on.”

“You’re wrong,” said Denson earnestly. “You yourself admitted that what seemed to be the echo of the first shot in the dark might have been a second shot.”

“No, I don’t forget that. I’ll even go so far as to admit that two shots were fired in the dark. But this much I will say, I have been trying to find out who fired the shot which came after the lights went on again. I am strongly convinced that that is the shot which killed Mr. Hamilton.”

“I’d like to believe you,” said Denson, “but I can’t.”

“Why?”

“The stories all tally that Hamilton was sinking to the floor when the lights were snapped on.”

“True enough; but isn’t it likely that a man who has always led a sedentary life, and then is suddenly gripped in a deadly fight with another man, should be somewhat surprised when at the climax the lights are suddenly extinguished, two shots

—or one—fired, and then the room suddenly bathed in light again? Imagine yourself in that predicament; can't you visualize the scene—the surcharged tenseness of it, the fierce, emotional strain—your dazed attitude when the lights went on. And then the shot, and you sink to the floor. Of course it would look as though you had been shot while the lights were out.”

“Then why not Hartigan—in desperation?” pursued Denson doggedly.

“You're a good lawyer, Mr. Denson. But you seem to forget that Hartigan was shot in the *right* wrist. You see, you are giving yourself away—you are trying to prove that Hartigan did it when you yourself are convinced that he did not.”

Denson flushed.

“Touche! As a matter of fact, I am convinced that either Miss Duval or Mr. Harrelson did it. But I agree with you that Badger did not—his bullet went some-

where; and if, as you say, the bullet which hit Hartigan was travelling into the room and not out of it, then Badger's bullet must have done it. Therefore, it rests between by clients and the burglar, and I'd rather believe in the guilt of the latter."

"So would I," said Carroll simply. "But I am letting circumstances right themselves in my mind. You see, gentlemen, the popular idea of the detective is a man who, by some God-given inspiration when the facts of the case are spread before him, immediately suspects the man who eventually proves to be guilty.

"How he does it—by what mental leg-erdemain—I have never been able to discover. But, as I say—he usually knows instinctively; and he is never wrong. He then proceeds to chase the wrong persons through some three hundred and fifty pages of a novel, finally swinging around and surprising the reader of the tale by the apprehension of the right man.

"I am not that sort of a character. My method is simple; I am merely marshalling before me all the facts of the case, down to the minutest detail. I am trying to weigh each in the balance and give each the attention that it appears to deserve. When I feel confident that I have all the facts before me, I will then try to decide who really did the killing, and how. But please, please do me the favour of ridding yourselves of the idea that I am a fiction detective holding back in my mind the name of the person who really did it. I assure you that I am as much up in the air as you are."

"That all sounds good, Carroll," said Hall, "but you admitted not so long ago that you had started out with pretty well-formed suspicions."

"I did," said Carroll quietly, "and they were all knocked into a cocked hat by later developments. And I prefer not to tell

my suspicions to you. There are a good many things in this case I cannot make head or tail of—which is the reason I do not want to tell you what I originally thought. I want you to review the case for yourselves—open-mindedly, and then let me know honestly what your conclusions are. You stand as much chance, if not more, of hitting the correct solution. I can promise you this—we shall know something before very long, and in the meanwhile I want to get Mr. Denson's consent to a little plan of mine."

"Which is?" asked the lawyer.

"To return to headquarters, confront Vincent Harrelson with Miss Duval—without telling either anything about the other—and then deliberately listen. How about it?"

Denson shook his head slowly.

"I'm afraid that's not playing the game squarely."

“Do you want the truth of the matter, Denson? That is a quick way of learning where they stand.”

Denson paced slowly up and down the veranda. What Carroll said was true; neither Eunice nor Vincent Harrelson knew that the other had confessed. Suddenly confronted with one another, they might be startled into speaking the truth. Denson whirled and nodded.

“Another damn-fool proceeding on my part, Carroll, but you can have your way.”

“Great! I assure you, Mr. Denson, you are doing a sensible thing. Now—back to headquarters.”

In a short time they were back at the police station and Badger was left in his private cell in the company of Roberts, Carroll’s man.

Carroll arranged things with expedition. Johnson and Smith, two of Carroll’s men, were instructed about bringing Eunice and

Vincent Harrelson into the rest room within thirty seconds of one another; there to leave them without a word. And then, when the stage was set, Carroll inquired for Rollins.

“What’s that?” questioned Hall wonderingly. “What do you want with Rollins?”

“He is the head of the police department’s detective force; I think he should be here.”

Hall shook his head.

“Aren’t you equivocating, Carroll? Haven’t you some ulterior motive?”

Carroll grinned enigmatically.

“Perhaps.”

“What is it?”

“Draw your own conclusions. At least, it will do no harm for Rollins to hear what transpires.”

Rollins was called and the situation sketched to him. He appeared surprised

at first that Carroll had not entirely dropped the case, but the outside detective placated him.

“You see, Rollins, I don’t like to drop the case until it is absolutely cleared up—and, while circumstantial evidence does undoubtedly point to Red Hartigan, we have two other self-confessed suspects who must be cleared before we can close up the record. Isn’t that so?”

“Ye-e-s; but as soon as they know about Hartigan——”

“Exactly,” beamed Carroll naïvely, and then nodded to his two men. Rollins scowled momentarily.

“That’s another thing I don’t like,” he asserted none too pleasantly. “Why’ve you got your men on the job here instead of the reg’lars?”

“A little idiosyncrasy of mine, Rollins. However, I’ll trot ’em away soon enough. Now let’s keep silent, all of us. From this room here we can see something and

hear everything. Not a soul is to say a word."

A silence fell on them as they stood, grouped, in the dressing room between the rest room and the showers. Their expressions afforded a study for a facial artist. Denson plainly betrayed his keen personal interest and his fear that he had done the wrong thing in consenting to the forthcoming meeting; Hall was figuratively on his toes with interest, part personal and part impersonal; Rollins was sullen and rather ill at ease; Carroll placid and smiling benignly.

The door opened and Vincent Harrelson entered the rest room. Smith left him with a word, and Harrelson stared curiously about, plainly at a loss for an explanation. And then, a few seconds later, in came Eunice Duval. The officer in charge of her left the pair alone; the door closed, and they faced each other.

The surprise visible on the face of each

could not have been simulated; even the chronically doubting Rollins knew that it was real. For perhaps five seconds the young couple stared at one another, and then they did the perfectly natural and normal thing for two young people who are very much in love. They swept together, and Vincent took the girl in his arms and kissed hungrily. Then he let her lean back in his arms and stared into her eyes.

"It's good to see you, sweetheart," he said softly. "But how in the world did you know I was here? The papers haven't a word about me—at least, that's what Smith said."

A puzzled look flashed into her eyes.

"They didn't tell me you were here, Vincent. They simply said that there was some one to see me, and then brought me in."

"*Brought you in?*"

"Why, yes—certainly."

He shook his head.

"I don't understand, dear."

The colour mounted to her face.

"Surely you don't think I would have kept silent. I came down here immediately after I shot Mr. Hamilton——"

He went white; the big, muscular hands which gripped her shoulders tightened until she winced with the pain of it.

"What are you saying?" he cried hoarsely. "After *you* shot Hamilton?"

"Why, certainly, dear; what else was there for me to do?"

Suddenly he threw back his head and laughed with grim humour. Her face grew very grave, and she touched him gently on the arm.

"Vincent—what's the matter? Please tell me——"

"Don't you understand, darling? Can't you see why they brought us together in here? They've no doubt got a dictagraph rigged up somewhere and are listening to every word we're saying."

“What has that to do with it?” she said doggedly. “I’ve told them I did it——”

“And so have I,” he flashed. “Do you suppose for one minute that I would have allowed that sacrifice on your part?” The words were pouring torrentially from his lips. “Do you suppose that I will allow your name to be dragged through the mire because, bless you, you think that you will be absolved by a jury while I would be convicted? Go tell them, dear, that you didn’t. I’ll get off, never fear. I shot him in self-defence.”

“Vincent!” Her arms went up about his neck and her eyes bored straight into his. “You mustn’t do this thing; it is wonderful of you, just what I would have expected, but you cannot; you must not.”

He laughed shortly.

“My dear little girl, it wouldn’t take them very long to find out that you did not shoot Mr. Hamilton. And then they’d find out about my quarrel with him and

get me. My self-defence plea would amount to nothing, then, would it? I thought I'd better face the music; had better take my medicine right. He did attack me, and it was he who pulled the revolver from the drawer. If there is such a thing as justice in the courts—and I believe that there is—I will be let off."

Very suddenly the girl seated herself. Her eyes were misty.

"Kiss me, Vincent."

He did as bidden, and then she continued:

"Now sit down, please; I want to argue with you."

"There's no room for argument, dear."

"Please, Vincent."

He drew a chair close to hers, possessed himself of her hand, and as she talked he stroked it gently. Her eyes flamed with a wonderful light, a light which brought lumps to the throat of the eavesdropping quartet in the next room.

"Listen, dear," she said softly, "you must listen to sense. I came down and confessed because I was afraid they would find out about your quarrel and fight with Mr. Hamilton and would arrest you. I shot him, as you well know, just as the lights went out. They won't do anything to me—it was done in the heat of passion and when it seemed that he would kill you."

"Let me interrupt," he said firmly. "That defence would never go. In the first place, you had no revolver."

"I picked it up off the floor when you tore it from his hand."

"Don't talk nonsense, Eunice. You're saying all that because you, too, think that we are being listened to. Imagine that little runt of a man tearing a revolver from my hands."

"He didn't," she persisted. "You tore it from his hands. I picked it up and fired just after the lights went out. When they

went up again he was falling. Oh, it was terrible!"

"It was that—and more," he agreed soberly. "But there's no use for any more of this stage play. I'm willing to take my chances; they cannot convict me of murder; manslaughter, perhaps, but not murder. The chances are that they will let me off scot-free."

"As though *I'd* be willing to chance that, dear."

"Why not?" he pleaded wildly. "I shot him!"

"Please, dear—all of that is for the benefit of any one who may be listening, and you know it. Don't put your neck into a noose! You didn't even have the revolver."

The man shrugged hopelessly.

"Are you going to stick to that ridiculous story, sweetheart?"

"It is the truth."

"Eunice!" His voice grew sharp.

"You put me in the light of a man confessing to save his sweetheart. I wouldn't do it if you had really shot him; they'd let you off, all right enough. But I picked up that revolver and fired in the dark—I had taken aim first. I'm a good shot; you are not."

"I was standing very close to him."

"And I was closer. Can't you see that they'll never hang me for what I did?"

"I'll not allow you to take chances."

"And you won't retract your ridiculous confession?"

"I have told the truth."

"You will stick to that story?"

"Positively."

"Then," he said hopelessly, "God help us both!"

"Why?" she cried anxiously. "You don't mean to say that you will refuse to retract in the face of what I have just said?"

"I mean just that, dear. I shot him,

and I was willing to take the consequences. In view of your implication, I am afraid I shall have to amend my story so that it will not look so much like self-defence—that I will lose the jury's sympathy and they'll be more liable to convict me."

"They'll never convict you. They will realize that I am telling the truth."

"Then," he said simply, "I shall never hold my head up again. You mean well, I am sure; but you are doing a headstrong, foolish thing. I am sorry, dear; although it makes me love you the more."

A sudden, crafty light crept into her eyes.

"Did you hear a second shot?—it sounded just as though it were fired when the lights went on again."

He frowned.

"You will claim that you fired that?"

"Did you hear it?"

"Yes—of course I did."

"Where did it come from?"

"I don't know, dear. I probably imagined it."

"If it had been real and not a figment of the imagination—where would you guess it came from?"

"Outside, I should say."

"Good! And did you know that they found a burglar lying unconscious and wounded, behind that screen?"

"What? You mean——"

"That we'll both probably get off, if we want to. I mean that they are sure that his bullet killed Mr. Hamilton."

The young artist shook his head slowly.

"No, dear; I certainly did not hit the screen when I fired and the burglar was wounded. The chances are his revolver went off and he hit himself. It was my shot——"

"Don't lie! It was I who fired—you know it!"

In the adjoining room, Carroll nodded to the others and beckoned them to follow.

Once in the courtyard, the group faced each other, their expressions denoting varying degrees of bewilderment. Carroll spoke—addressing Rollins.

“What do you make of it?” he questioned.

Rollins deliberated, and then——

“I think they’re both lyin’,” he said bluntly, “because each really thinks the other did it!”

CHAPTER XI

FIVE minutes later, Vincent Harrelson answered a rap on the door and David Carroll came in, followed by the lawyer, the police commissioner, and Barrett Rollins. Eunice stepped forward and spoke with admirable self-possession.

“Did you enjoy our conversation?” she questioned brightly.

Carroll smiled.

“I can’t say that I did,” he answered. “You only succeeded in puzzling me more than ever.”

“It’s what they tried to do,” growled Rollins.

“Quite evidently,” returned Carroll. “And now, Miss Duval, may I ask you one question?”

“A thousand if you like. But I tell you right now——”

“There’s no use quibbling!” snapped Harrelson aggressively. “I killed Hamilton, and Miss Duval, thinking that she will be let off because she is a woman, has confessed to save me. You tell her this, Carroll, honestly: Do you or do you not think that I would be acquitted on the facts as you know them?”

Carroll eyed him keenly.

“According to the facts as you have presented them, Mr. Harrelson, I should say that you would be acquitted without any great trouble. What do you think, Mr. Denson?”

The lawyer nodded gravely.

“I think they’d let you off, son, provided your story stood the test of cross-examination.”

Harrelson turned triumphantly to the girl.

“You see, dear; even Mr. Denson ad-

mits that I'd be let off. Now will you retract your silly, soft-hearted confession?"

The girl looked up and then away again.

"You're a dear boy," she said in a choked little voice. "But, you see, gentlemen, I cannot retract the truth. I shot Mr. Hamilton. You wanted to ask me a question, Mr. Carroll?"

"Yes—it is a question directed at both of you. During your little talk just now you seemed to agree that there was one revolver, and one only, among the three of you. Is that correct?"

They were silent for a minute, suspecting a trap. Denson spoke:

"I'd advise that you tell the truth."

"Yes," said Harrelson, "there was just one revolver—Mr. Hamilton's. I picked it up off the floor and fired at him."

Eunice shook her head.

"It is just a question of which one is

telling the truth, Mr. Carroll. I give you my word that I fired the revolver."

"That's all I wanted to know," replied the detective. "And now, if you will, I am going to ask you to go with us to the house. I will take Mr. Rollins here and Red Hartigan with us. I want the scene re-enacted exactly as it happened last night. Mr. Denson agrees. Do you?"

"I do," answered the girl promptly.

"And I." The reply of the young man was almost as ready.

A few minutes later they were speeding toward Hamilton's handsome home in two large touring cars. On their arrival they found Mrs. Faber on the long veranda to greet them.

Carroll bowed to her as he led the party up the steps by the L of the porch.

"Good morning, Mrs. Faber! Have you heard anything from your maid or the butler yet?"

The little old lady shook her head.

"No, sir. I don't understand any of it, either—unless they got scared when the shooting started and ran away. I might understand the maid doing that, sir; but not the butler. He was a big, strapping man, sir."

"He was that," indorsed Denson. "I saw him last night, and he didn't impress me as being the type of man to be frightened by a little shooting."

"What's all this talky-talk about the butler?" broke in Rollins roughly. "Whada we care where he's gone? We got the guy that done the work, an' we should worry if the butler never comes back."

"No-o, on the face of it, we shouldn't," said Carroll slowly. "But in a case as complex as this one I prefer to talk to every one who was near the scene at the time."

"Piffle!" snapped Rollins. "S'more o'

your dam'—beggin' your pardon, ladies—highfalutin' stuff. Got to go ahead just so, like it's wrote down in the book. Honest, you private sleuths gimme a pain; if you was to see a guy shoot another one you'd go up an' examine th' footprints an' the calibre of the revolver instead of chasin' the feller that you seen do it."

Instead of growing angry, Carroll threw back his head and laughed ringingly.

"Pretty good, Rollins. Maybe you're right, after all. I'm somewhat of an old foggy in those things; like the farmer with the jointed fishing rod and gold-mounted handle—he whips the stream all day and catches a trout two inches long while the kid on the bank with a switch from a tree, four yards of string, and a bent pin catches a dozen."

Rollins grinned.

"That's about the size of it, Mr. Carroll. I wasn't slappin' at you personal, y'understand; it's just that you fellers ain't used

to the game, an' y' travel all around th' block to git next door."

"Well, as Rollins has said," went on Carroll gravely, albeit he was not unconscious and not unamused at the glances of wonder on the faces of Hall and Denson at his reception of Rollins' brusqueness, "that eliminates a need to interview the butler. Now for the living room."

They entered the room in which the shooting had occurred, and as they did so the weird associations of the place affected the nerves of all. They became quiet—all of them save Rollins. As for the head of the regular office, he strutted up and down the room with his chest out like a pouter pigeon, proclaiming his theories to all who would listen.

They were theories which absolved Eunice and Harrelson from all blame and loomed ominous for a certain Mr. Red Hartigan, who scowled silently at the big man.

"Helluva lot he knows!" growled Hartigan once. Carroll silenced him with a look.

Finally the young detective placed the characters in the little tragedy, himself assuming the rôle of the dead man; Hartigan stood behind the screen; Eunice took her place behind the portières; Harrelson and Carroll started into the library, adjoining the living room on the western side.

"I want to be sure that everything is just as it was last night," he said. "Are you sure it is, Miss Duval?"

The girl glanced around.

"Yes, except that that large door there opening to the veranda was open. The portières behind this French window here were closed, those over the window on the other side of the door were partly closed, and those over the window behind the screen were thrown back—I remember throwing them back myself during the

afternoon so that the breeze could come through."

"And the screen over the corner of the veranda?"

"Was down on the southern side, because the exposure is slightly westerly, too, and we did that to keep the afternoon sun away. The screen on the eastern exposure had been rolled up."

"Good!" said Carroll. "Now begin at the beginning. You, Hartigan—you had your gun out."

Hartigan frowned deeply.

"Say, listen here, cull! If you've brung me up here to catch me in a trap, y'r gonna get fooled, see! I didn't have no gat—never carried one. I had a bundle of swag, an' I was standin' back here—slipped in through th' back stairs, hall, dinin' room, an' was waitin' to vamosé through this here winder when I seen this girl step out from behind them curtains yonder."

"No one was in the room when you came in from the dining room?"

"Didn't see no one. Guess she was there all th' time."

"Why didn't you make your get-away right off?"

"Because," explained the burglar, "it was th' other half of th' winder that was open, an' that was beyond th' screen. So there wasn't nothin' to do but for me to wait until th' coast was clear. I lay low—until th' fight started."

"Hmm! Did you see this man, Miss Duval?"

She shook her head.

"No. No one came in the room right then but Donaldson."

A battery of eyes flashed to hers. Carroll was patently surprised.

"Donaldson?"

"The butler," she explained.

"You didn't mention him. Why?"

"I forgot him. He came in the room,

looked out toward the garden, and walked into the dining room again."

"Did you see him, Hartigan?"

"Yeh, I seen him."

"Why didn't you mention it?"

"I got my own good reasons for that."

Rollins burst in violently.

"It's probable that the butler was in on the robbery!" he rasped. "That's why this here guy won't say nothin'—low as they get, they don't get so low as to squeal on a pal. But that'd explain your butler beatin' it when the fireworks started."

"So-o! *Was* Donaldson in with you?"

"That's f'r me to know an' you to find out," said Hartigan belligerently. "I've said all I'm gonna say about him."

"Which is tantamount to an admission that the butler *was* concerned in the burglary," interjected Denson. Hartigan looked at him sharply.

"It ain't tantymount to nothin', you wise guy!"

"Y'r shootin' off y'r mouth too much!" growled Rollins. "One more word an' I'll——"

"Y' can't scare me——"

"Here, here!" Carroll stepped between the pair. "None of that, please. You, Hartigan, get behind the screen. For safety's sake, Roberts, take your place on the veranda to see that this man doesn't try any funny work. And now, folks, if you will——"

He walked into the library with Harreison, and that young man took up the story.

"We were standing here by the centre table, quarrelling," he said simply. "It got more and more violent, and finally he struck me. I knocked him down. I was kind of sorry about it, because he was so much smaller than I. But he was game, all right. He jumped up and made a dash for the table. Got a big paper weight off there and slammed it at me. Fortunately

I ducked and managed to grapple with him."

"Just one minute, Mr. Harrelson. How did you happen to be in here with him?"

"Mr. Hamilton did not like me, and we started quarrelling about my attentions to his ward, to whom I have the honour to be engaged. We met in the living room, and he asked her to leave us alone. She refused, and he suggested that we come in here where we could be alone. I, of course, agreed."

"And why did you go behind the portières, Miss Duval?"

"I thought they might come back in the room and think I had gone. I came back when I heard the violent quarrel and the noise evidently caused by the throwing of the paper weight."

"I see. And just about then is when you came in from the dining room, wasn't it, Hartigan?"

"Guess so. Th' room looked empty, an' this here lady come out from behind them there curtains right afterward."

"Go ahead, Harrelson."

"As I say, I grappled with him. All I wanted to do was to hold him quiet, but he was stronger than I thought and slippery as an eel. We banged against the door and it flew open. We staggered into the room."

"Where was Miss Eunice at that time?"

The girl took her place halfway between the door and the table.

"I was standing right here, frightened to death."

"Is that the way you saw them, Hartigan?"

"That's th' way it looked to me. Course I couldn't see awful plain from behind that there screen."

"And then?" prompted Carrol.

"Mr. Hamilton tore loose from me," went on the young artist. "Before I knew

what he was doing he had the drawer of that table open and a revolver in his hand. Eunice screamed, and I jumped for him and grabbed his arm. Then——”

“I turned out the lights,” said Hartigan.

“*You!*” It was a chorus from Eunice, Harrelson and Rollins.

“Yes, I knew that,” said Carroll quietly. “Go ahead, Mr. Harrelson.”

“As the lights went out the revolver dropped to the floor. I reached down, grabbed it, and shot him.”

Eunice’s face flamed.

“That is not the truth, Mr. Carroll. You can look at him and see that it is not the truth. The revolver spun against my feet. Before I realized what I was doing I picked it up and fired at Mr. Hamilton. And he did not tell the truth about one other feature in his eagerness to shield me. I had the revolver in my hands *before* the lights went out; isn’t that so, Hartigan?”

The burglar shook his head.

"I dunno, miss. Y'see, about then I was fixin' to reach for th' light switch; but I do know this—that the revolver dropped *before* I turned off the lights!"

"A-a-ah!" A sigh escaped the rigid Denson. He turned sharply to Harrelson. "Is that the truth, Vincent?"

The young man coloured violently.

"I shot in the dark," he persisted mulishly.

"I don't believe you," announced Denson finally, "although I wish to God I could. *You* have a good defence."

Eunice flashed him a glance of appreciation.

"Thanks, Mr. Denson."

Carroll strolled idly about the room, examining floors and ceiling. From the opposite corner, he spoke over his shoulder:

"Would you mind standing exactly on the spot from which you shot, Miss Du-

"Certainly." She placed herself immediately between the table and the door, on a line with the corner of the room. Carroll walked back across the room and extended both hands—one to Eunice and one to Harrelson.

"I think that about absolves the pair of you two foolish children," he said heartily.

A gasp of surprise went up and a chorus of "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Carroll slowly, "that the bullet that was fired from that spot never hit Mr. Hamilton at all. It struck in the very corner of the walls and ceiling yonder! You can see the hole for yourselves!"

CHAPTER XII

IT was Denson, his mind trained to cope with sudden twists, to whom the legal aspect made an immediate appeal. He leaned forward and made a futile attempt to conceal the excitement in his voice:

“Do you mean, Carroll, that they are free?”

Carroll shrugged.

“Practically. Can’t let them off entirely yet, but I think I can promise them a release on their own recognizance. And now”—he turned to them—“I would like to know, just to satisfy myself, who really did fire that shot?”

“No trap, Carroll,” warned Denson.

“Answer or not,” retorted the detective. “As for me, I play my cards face up. Two out of three were agreed that the shot was

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fired in the dark. It has been the consensus of opinion and my personal belief that the shot which killed Mr. Hamilton was not fired from close quarters—the appearance of the wound, the lack of burning, and the absence of powder stains attest that. But it is certain that Mr. Hamilton's revolver *was* fired. Where, then, did the bullet go? It doesn't take any transcendent investigator to find the hole made by a bullet fired from that spot at Mr. Hamilton. And there it is." He pointed to a small, round hole plugged in the juncture point of the two walls and the ceiling in the corner near the hall. "So there, Denson, is my case against these two young people. They can answer or not, as they wish. I've played fair and aboveboard all the way through, and was merely trying to satisfy my very human curiosity as to which one did it."

The eyes of the men met and held. Denson threw up his hands.

"You should have been a lawyer, Carroll. 'Ye have a way wid yez!' Tell him, Eunice."

"I fired the shot," she said simply. She was on the verge of tears from the emotional relief. But Harrelson put out his hand.

"She did not!" he insisted. "It was I who fired it."

"Vincent!"

"Eunice!"

"As your lawyer, Vincent, I give you permission to tell."

"You are sure that that is where the bullet went?"

"Positive."

"Well"—the young man spread his hands wide with a significant gesture—"I'm afraid I'm convicting myself a liar; but Eunice fired. My story is absolutely true up to the point of firing the shot."

Hall looked at the young man in surprise.

"I congratulate you, sir," he said quietly. "I had thought that chivalry was dead."

"Not that, sir," returned the young man somewhat bashfully. "You see, I took pains to concoct a story which pretty well protected me."

"Poppycock and balderdash! Your story was true, and you were willing to shoulder the blame! Damme, sir, I'm glad to shake your hand, if it has taken the death of my best friend to prove to me that there are a few men alive in whom the best of the mediaeval still exists."

Carroll resumed his slow pacing of the room. As he passed each of his three men, he whispered a few words to them significantly, then walked on nonchalantly, as though taking a constitutional. His keen eyes, lighted with the joy of the chase, missed no detail of the sparsely, if handsomely, furnished room. Finally he faced the others."

“And now,” he said, “we have proved the innocence of our two chief actors. I don’t know whether you gentlemen realize, in your personal relief over the liberation of these young folks, that we are as far from the capture of the murderer as we were thirty seconds after the fatal shot was fired.”

They stared at him in dazed silence. What he said was true; that phase of the case had not appealed to them. Hall opened his mouth to mention Badger, then closed it abruptly—like a fish gasping in the fresh air. He remembered two things regarding Badger—first of all, that they had pretty well proven his innocence, and secondly, that Rollins knew nothing of Badger, or his connection with the case.

He remembered, also, the fact that there was a third shot; two had already been accounted for—Eunice’s, which had fortunately gone wild and dug itself a burrow in the ceiling; and Badger’s, which

had inflicted the painful wound in Hartigan's right wrist.

But Hartigan's revolver had also been fired. According to the burglar's story, *he* had not fired. Furthermore, it had been pretty well agreed that the fatal shot had been fired immediately after the lights were turned on. Badger stubbornly maintained that he had fired in the dark. If that were true and it was a fact that his bullet was the one which had wounded Hartigan, then it followed that Hartigan could not well have fired with his right wrist mangled.

It seemed that Carroll had been working in a circle, eliminating one barrier after another only to find each new one harder to surmount. But if Carroll and his friends were bewildered, Barrett Rollins, head of the regular detective force, was not at all at a loss as to who was the culprit.

"There was three of them in the room,"

said Rollins earnestly. "We know Miss Duval fired an' we've found her bullet—in a place where Hartigan's couldn't of gone. I been noticin', too, that that there hole in the screen was made by a bullet travellin' *into* the room from behind th' screen, and if youse fellers had eyes in your heads you'd of noticed that it is just about th' height that Red could of fired from to kill Mr. Hamilton."

"He could have been stooping, had he fired at that height."

"Stoopin', sure he'd of been stoopin'. He was hidin', wasn't he? An' when a man hides does he stand upright? G'wan! Y' don't think any. Even in a dark alley a man'll stoop if he's tryin' t' make a get-away. Hartigan is th' man."

"You're quite sure of that?" questioned Carroll quietly.

"Sure? M'Gawd, I *know* it!"

"How do you know?"

Rollins flushed.

"I know, that's all. There ain't no one else could of done it."

"No, that's true; that's true. And yet," he continued in a placidly argumentative tone, as though discussing a purely theoretical case, "you forget that some one shot Hartigan."

"Poof! Maybe he wasn't shot just then."

"But he was, you see."

"I don't see any such of a dam' thing! —'scusing th' French. You fly cops think you've got it all down pat when y' don't know a thing. T' tell me that Red Hartigan couldn't of been shot when——"

"He was shot behind that screen!" Carroll bit his words off sharply. A hint of antagonism, the first he had shown toward Rollins, had crept into his tones.

"You're crazy!"

Carroll turned away, smiling again.

"Well, there's no use arguing with you."

"Of course there ain't." And then, as Carroll fell into a low-voiced conversation with Eunice and Harrelson, Rollins strode across the room after him. One big hand shot out and Carroll was whirled around. The face of the young detective went white, and he shook himself loose.

"Rollins," he said acidly, "you will keep your hands to yourself."

"I'll do what I please——" started the man from headquarters, and then calmed down suddenly with the remembrance that he was in the presence of the police commissioner. "S'pose you tell me why you *know* that this here yegg was potted while he was there an' not before."

"I don't believe you are interested in my theories," returned Carroll quietly.

Rollins' voice took on a pleading nuance."

"Now, Mr. Carroll, I wasn't meanin' anything——"

"I'm nothing but a fly cop," flung out

Carroll, clipping his words. "But I have sense enough to know that his wound was bleeding profusely, and that *there were no blood traces anywhere except behind that screen!*"

An involuntary "Oh!" was ripped from Rollins' lips. Of a sudden his temper grew sullen again.

"Well, whadaya drivin' at? D'yuh have to have everybody mixed up in the case come out an' paraded before y'? Then take y'r pick?"

This time real anger flamed into Carroll's eyes. His face grew livid and his fists clenched. He came very close to Rollins, and his eyes burned into the little, close-set orbs of the chief of the regular force.

"Let's have this out right now, Rollins, once and for all. From the very beginning of this case I haven't liked your manner. So long as it was partially impersonal and dealt in generalities, I thought

it beneath me to pay any particular attention. Now you're forcing it on me, and I'm not going to ignore it longer. From this moment on you will remember that I am your superior officer, and you will act accordingly. And my first order is that you keep your filthy tongue between your teeth!"

"Damn you!" Rollins' muscular frame tensed, and for a brief moment it appeared that the two men were about to clash physically. Then the larger man relaxed slowly, his eyes holding the steady, steely ones of Carroll as though transfixed. The little blond chap nodded.

"That's better. Any time you care to talk decently you can talk. But you've uttered your last personality; get that?"

Rollins was beet-red and in the grip of a murderous anger. But he had been too good a disciplinarian on the force to give way again in the light of what he had read in Carroll's unfaltering gaze.

“Very well, sir,” he said with simulated respect. “Until this case is finished I’ll remember that you’re over my head.”

“That’s all I ask.” Carroll turned toward the others, in a second ridding himself of the anger he had just exhibited. “We are still far from a solution of this case,” he said. “Instead of having two people who claim to have committed the crime, we have one suspect against whom the evidence is wholly circumstantial, and not at all strong. You, Hartigan, said something about pals; do you mean that you were not alone in this robbery?”

Hartigan thought for a moment and then nodded.

“Yes, sir, just that. Me and my pals—we never work alone, y’see; an’ they was with me.”

“And of course you won’t tell who they were?”

“Of course not, sir.”

"Hmm! Will you tell me this? Did one of *them* shoot you?"

The burglar was a bit dazed by the question.

"Why, cert'n'y not, sir. Ain't I told you right from th' first that I was shot while I was standin' behind th' screen?"

"Do you realize, Hartigan, the position this puts you in? So long as we suspected either Miss Duval or Mr. Harrelson, here, there was a chance that we might believe your story. But now even you will admit that neither of them did it, and you were the only other person in the room, and your gun had been fired——"

"No," burst out the big man, "that's not true, sir, and ye know it! That gun was planted on me! How, I dunno. All I know is I ain't never toted a gat. Rollins, there, could tell y' that if he would. Y'see," he explained painstakingly, "us crooks has got habits just like reg'lar guys. Some of us is gunmen an' some ain't.

An' Rollins knows all of us—that's his business. An' he knows that when a man has a rep for not packin' a rod he don't do it, that's all. Ain't that so, Rollins?"

"Not in your case," answered Rollins fiercely. "You've been caught with a gun before."

Hartigan's face flamed.

"Cop or no cop," he raved, "I'm here tellin' ye that y'r a dirty, rotten liar! An' that goes as she lays if I swing for it!"

Rollins leaped forward—but Hall stopped him with a whispered word of warning. He turned to Carroll.

"What that yegg says is part true," he explained. "I know 'em all, I got their records at my finger tips; some of 'em do carry guns an' some don't. But take it from me—an' I know—there never was a bunch of second-story men that set out to crack a crib like this here one without heelin' themselves. My Gawd, Mr. Carroll, don't that sound reasonable?"

“Yes, Rollins, it sounds reasonable!”

“It’s the truth,” insisted Rollins.

“It’s a dam’——”

“Enough of that, Hartigan!” Carroll’s voice was again the implacable steel which forbade denial. “What I was driving at is this: Whether that gun was there or whether it wasn’t—whether you fired it or whether you didn’t, the fact remains that any jury in the world will believe that, in view of the circumstances, you killed Mr. Hamilton. I’m not asking you to squeal on your pals in an ordinary case. If you were only in for a burglary indictment that’d be one thing—but this is murder.”

“You don’t need to go on no farther, Mr. Carroll, because it’s just wastin’ y’r breath, see? Before I swing I’ll tell who them other guys was, because I’d want them to do the same for me. But, sure’s I stand here, I don’t know about them havin’ anything to do with the shootin’.”

“One of them might have killed Hamil-

ton himself and planted the gun on you?"

Hartigan shook his head with dogged loyalty.

"I'll take my chances, Mr. Carroll. If they jack me up for murder, I'll tell. But until they do an' I'm on trial I'll stand my chances of the real murderer bein' caught. An' as for one of my pals plantin' th' rod on me—ain't I told you they was my pals? They wouldn't do nothin' like *that*."

"There's something about you, Hartigan," declared Carroll spontaneously, "that I like."

"An' there's some difference between you an' a 'tec' who makes up his mind that a certain chap is guilty 'cause he's got him with the goods, an' after that doesn't look no farther except to send the poor sucker up the river or maybe to the chair. That's all I gotta say."

It was too much for the excitable Rollins. He swung on Carroll.

"I'll take orders from you, Carroll—but

before I'll stand up and let a damned yegg like him hand me that line o' talk I'll resign an'——”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Hall. He crossed the room to the hall door and flung it open. Little Mrs. Faber, blinking and ill at ease and patently in the grip of a new and greater excitement, minced into the room.

“Gentlemen,” she said softly, very much impressed with the spotlight position she held, “the most marvellous thing has developed—the most unbelievable.”

“Yes, yes, Mrs. Faber. What is it?”

“You would hardly believe it. Even when Maggie—she's the cook—when she told me I just said to her: ‘Maggie,’ I said, ‘if I didn't know——’”

Eunice took a hand. She placed a hand lightly over the little housekeeper's lips.

“What is it, Mrs. Faber? Tell us—please.”

“It's Ethel, your maid.”

“What about Ethel?”

“Maggie just went up in the attic—
*and there she found Ethel, bound and
gagged and half dead!*”

CHAPTER XIII

“WHERE is she now?” flashed Carroll.

A deep pink dyed the old lady’s cheeks.

“She’s up there, tied, just like we found her.”

In spite of himself, Hall chuckled. Mrs. Faber swung on him in indignation.

“Didn’t I have orders to leave everything just like it was found?” she demanded irately. “And didn’t we find her bound and gagged?”

Her logic was unanswerable, and they followed her up the front staircase, down the hall, and thence to the attic. The attic itself belied its name. It was ceiled and comfortably plastered, and radiators gave testimony to the fact that Hamilton had provided top-floor warmth for the win-

ter. In answer to a question as to where Ethel could be found, Mrs. Faber nodded mysteriously.

"I'll show you soon enough—just follow."

She led the way to a door which she flung open, and Hall, Denson, Rollins and Carroll—with Eunice and Harrelson in the rear—followed her into a small, neatly furnished, prettily decorated room, with chintz curtain over the window through which the morning sun streamed cheerily. The room itself was in perfect order; the bed had not been slept in, the dresser was neatly fixed, every chair in place. Carroll looked around curiously.

"The maid, Mrs. Faber?"

"I said she was in the attic," flashed the old lady, "and she is."

"But this——"

"These are the servants' quarters. The attic is up yonder," and she indicated a flight of steps so steep as to resemble a lad-

der which led from the maid's room through a trapdoor to a false attic or loft. Carroll and Rollins produced flash lights and mounted swiftly to the top. The girl was lying on the rough floor boarding which covered the beams, and over her hovered the extremely articulate and very solicitous Maggie, explaining vociferously why she could not unbind the cords which held the girl. Carroll produced a knife and in a few strokes released her. With which Ethel promptly fainted.

It was the work of but a few minutes for Carroll and Rollins to bear her down the ladder and stretch her on the bed. Then the men retired, the door closed, and, after leaving his whisky flask for purposes of resuscitation, Rollins joined them. It was perhaps a half hour later that Mrs. Faber opened the door to announce that the combined efforts of herself, Eunice, and Maggie had succeeded in restoring Ethel to consciousness and that she could

not talk now, thanks to a growing hysteria.

"Rather peculiar she wasn't found when the house was first searched," volunteered Carroll.

"No," answered Rollins; "I did not have a chance to go over things as I wanted to before I found Hartigan, and once I had him I thought the case was solved. And I left no orders for a search with my men here; in fact, if Rafferty searched at all, it was on his own hook. So it isn't a bit peculiar."

The men repaired downstairs and Doctor Robinson was summoned. It was more than an hour later that he came down from upstairs to announce that Ethel would see the detectives, but urging that she be made to talk as little as possible.

"The poor girl has had a terrible time of it," said the man of medicine. "She has been lying in that cramped position and in constant terror for twelve hours. Be as easy with her as you can."

They filed quietly up to the third floor gain and were admitted to the room by Eunice. Hall, Denson, Rollins, and Harrelson took their places around the walls and Carroll drew a chair up to the bed. His face, as he gazed compassionately at the overwrought, unstrung girl, was that of a guileless boy; his eyes infinitely kind.

“Feeling better?” he asked soothingly.

Tears filled the girl’s eyes. Her body shook with sobs. Carroll touched her hand gently.

“There, there, my girl. You’re all right now and in the hands of friends. I wanted to ask you some questions, but if you’re feeling badly I’ll wait.”

“No—no—don’t! Mrs. Faber says it’s important that you should be knowing everything right away. And, oh!—she says they killed Mr. Hamilton!”

“Don’t you worry about that; we’re going to catch the man who did it. Suppose

you tell us what happened to you last night—if you feel well enough.”

“I ain’t feelin’ very well, sir, but I’ll tell all I know. I—I’m feeling awful bad, sir, but there ain’t no chance of my gettin’ things wrong because I ain’t been doin’ nothing but lyin’ up there, thinkin’, for—it seems like twelve years ’stead of twelve hours, sir.”

She wiped the tears from her eyes, controlled herself with an effort, and went on with her story:

“I come upstairs early last night, sir, so’s to read a perfectly grand story in a magazine. I was readin’ it when all of a sudden I hear somebody outside. At first I think it’s Donaldson—he’s the new butler, sir; but then I notice that the man who is walkin’ has got rubber heels on, an’ I know that Donaldson don’t wear them, and neither does Mr. Hamilton.

“Honest! I got cold and hot all over at the same time. I run to the winder an’

looked out to the garden. There was some one creepin' across t'ward that bush yonder——”

Carroll walked to the window and looked. The bush in question was situated about sixty feet from the house and directly in front of the big double doors opening from the living room onto the first-floor veranda. He interrupted the girl:

“What sort of looking man was it?”

“A big man, sir; a very big man—not so tall, sir, but he looked awful big in the moonlight.”

“I see. Go ahead.”

“Well, at first I thought I would scream for help, but I knew if I did that the burglar outside——”

“You are sure it was a burglar?”

“That’s the first thing I thought of, sir; an’ afterward, as I’m goin’ to tell you, I found out for sure it was. As I was sayin’, sir, I knew if I yelled he’d come in an’ shoot

me or cut my throat or do somethin' terrible like that. So I just got down an' crawled under the bed, thinkin' that maybe, if I laid real quiet, he wouldn't do me no harm.

"For a long time there wasn't any noise, an' then—oh, it was awful!—I seen my door openin', slow an' careful, so's it wouldn't creak. I was that scared I couldn't hardly breathe, an' was all cramped up with lyin' under th' bed, an' I got right hysterical.

"The man come in the room an' walked all around. I had turned off my light, but there's a light right outside the door, an' that made the room pretty bright, an' I noticed that it was shinin' right on me where I was layin' under the bed. I was scared to stay where I was, 'cause all he'd of had to do to see me would of been to look. So I made up my mind to try to move; that's where I made a terrible mistake, sir; be-

ause no sooner did I move than he heard me.”

She stopped for a second and covered her eyes with her hands, as though to shut out a vision of the nightmare. At length she went on, although her voice was by no means as steady as it had been:

“He acted awful quick, sir—reached over an’ turned on the light at the bulb with one hand an’ took out a big revolver with the other——”

“A-ah! He did have a revolver, then?”

“Cert’n’y, sir; don’t all burglars carry revolvers?”

“Some of ’em say they don’t,” broke in Rollins. The girl went on:

“He took out this big revolver an’ pointed it at the bed.

“‘Come out of that!’ he says real terrible an’ gruff. ‘Or, by God,’ he says, just like that, ‘I’ll shoot!’

“There wasn’t nothin’ else for me to do, sir, so I crawled out, an’ when I made as if to scream he tells me if I do he’s going to kill me right away; but if I don’t make no noise no harm will come to me. So I told him I’d do anything if he just wouldn’t kill me, an’ he said that he’d have to bind me and put a piece of cloth in my mouth so I wouldn’t scream, an’ then I’d have to climb up them there steps into the attic.

“I ast him what was he going to do with me when he got me there, an’ he said he wasn’t going to hurt me at all if I did that, but that he’d kill me if I didn’t, or if I tried any foolishness. So I said all right, I’d do it.

“He tied my hands behind my back, an’, even if he was a burglar, he was a real gentle feller once he got started, because he kept askin’ me was the rope too tight an’ did it hurt too much an’ sayin’ he was sorry he had to do it, but safety first was his mot-

ter. Then, when he got me up there, he laid me down as easy as he could an' tied my feet together, said to wait for a couple of hours an' then commence kickin' on the floor an' some one would come an' let me free.

"Then he goes down the ladder again and commences prowlin' about my room like he was waitin' for some one. I rolled over easy so's I could see the corner of the room by the door yonder, an' who should I see come up the stairs but Donaldson!"

"Donaldson?"

"The butler, sir. I held my breath, because I knew right away that he was gonna shoot Donaldson, but he didn't do nothin' of the kind; they shook hands an' started talkin'. I was s'prised, sir, because it was like they was old friends. But still I thought maybe Donaldson didn't know that he was a burglar, an' I was just gonna make a noise when Donaldson says to him—he says:

“‘Didja run into anybody up here, Lefty?’

“‘An’ then Lefty grins, just like that. ‘Yeh,’ he says; ‘some fool girl musta heard me an’ was hidin’ under the bed.’

“‘Then Donaldson says—shall I use the very words, sir?’”

“‘Yes, my girl—the very words.’”

“‘He says: ‘Damn the luck!’ Just like that, sir. ‘An’ what did you do with her, Lefty?’

“‘With that the man he calls Lefty kinder grins. ‘She’s a nice, commonsense girl,’ he says. ‘I told her I’d kill her if she didn’t do what I wanted, an’ I’ve got her, bound an’ gagged an’ all trussed up nice, lyin’ up in the attic yonder. By the time some one finds her we’ll have made our get-away.’

“‘Well, sir, I can’t tell you how terrible shocked I was at findin’ out Donaldson’s true nature. That’s the way with men, sir; you don’t know nothin’ about them un-

til you happen to overhear somethin' like I done with Donaldson. Just think of the risk I'd been runnin' with him, sir; sleepin' right in th' next room, where he could come in any night an' cut my throat an' steal all my savings! It was just Gawd's providence that he didn't. But there wasn't no use attractin' *him* for help—he'd most probably of come up an' killed me right then for makin' a noise.

“He seemed awful pleased that this man Lefty had tied me up an' put me in that awful place up yonder, an' he said he didn't have nothin' else to fear because it was Maggie's night out. Then they started talkin' about other things. Lefty says to Donaldson:

“ ‘How's things goin'?’

“ ‘Fine as prunes!’ Donaldson says, smilin'. ‘Conover's outside an' Hartigan's on the first floor with enough boodle to keep us all rich for a year.’

"Then Lefty shakes his head. 'I think I ought to get in on that,' he says.

"'Nothin' doin',' says Donaldson. 'Though we might give you a little rake-off. But you said all you wanted was them papers out of Mr. Hamilton's safe.'

"'You got 'em?' asks the burglar.

"Donaldson nodded yes an' took a packet tied with red ribbon out of his pocket an' handed 'em to him. 'There they are—th' whole bunch. That's your end, less'n we want to divide with you.'

"'Oh,' says the burglar, 'I'm gettin' out on the top side even if I don't get no coin! I guess I'd better be goin'.'

"'No time like now,' says Donaldson. 'You go down the front steps, an' be mighty careful because old man Hamilton's in the lib'ry, an' he's got company. They was raisin' some sort of hell'—that's just the word he used, sir, an' me thinkin' that he was a respectable man, sir—'they was raisin' hell,' he says, 'last I saw of 'em.

You'll find the latch on the front door loose. Take it easy, an', whatever y' do, don't get caught.'

" 'I won't,' says the other feller. 'No danger of that. I'll go right out th' front like I owned the house.'

"So they talked a little more, an' then Donaldson says: 'If you meet anybody there ain't to be no shootin', understand? Just beat it back upstairs an' I'll take care of you.'

" 'I ain't no gunman,' says the burglar.

" 'You got a gat, ain't you?' asks Donaldson.

" 'Yes,' he says; 'but so has Red Hartigan, an' he ain't no gunman.'

" 'Hartigan ain't got a gun,' says Donaldson. 'I searched him 'cause I didn't want no rough stuff.' "

"Just one minute," interrupted Carroll. "You are quite positive that Donaldson said he had searched Hartigan and that Hartigan did *not* have a gun?"

“Yes——”

“What’s that got to do with it?” broke in Rollins roughly. “Didn’t we find the gun on Hartigan?”

“Well, they tell each other good-bye, an’ Donaldson repeats that there ain’t to be no shootin’, an’ then the burglar goes downstairs, soft an’ easy.

“For a few minutes after he’s gone Donaldson stands there like he’s thinkin’ about somethin’, an’ then he begins to smile. Then he comes into my room an’ stands at the foot of them there steps an’ calls up to me.

“‘Don’t be worried, Ethel,’ he says, ‘I’m goin’ downstairs for a minute, an’ as soon as I come back I’ll let you loose.’

“An’ I didn’t answer him, sir; I wouldn’t talk to that kind of a man, an’, besides,” naïvely, “that rag was in my mouth an’ I couldn’t. So he goes downstairs, an’ there I lay, sir; couldn’t move nor nothin’ an’ frightened to death with all I’d been

through an' seen, an' after about five or ten minutes, sir—I'm not sure just how long it was—there came two shots——”

“Two?”

“It sounded like either two or three, sir. The first one or two, whichever it was, come right together; but the other one, which come five or six seconds later, seemed to me it came from the garden.”

“Why did it sound that way? Explain what you mean.”

“It was a different sound, sir; there wasn't no echo to it like there was to the first shot.”

“Cinch!” broke in Rollins quickly. “The first shot was really two an' seemed like an echo. The second come from Hartigan an' didn't have no echo.”

“That may be right,” agreed Carroll complacently. “And now, just to make sure—would you recognize the burglar if you saw him, Ethel?”

“Yes, sir; surely, sir.”

Carroll immediately dispatched Hall downstairs with instructions to have Roberts bring Hartigan to the girl's room. In five minutes Hall was back, and behind him the immense figure of the wounded burglar.

"Is that the man?" queried Carroll.

The girl glanced at him briefly.

"No, sir; certainly not. The man they called Lefty was an undersized runt of a man, not like this one at all!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE passing of the hours had served only to complicate the Hamilton case. At the outset it had been pregnant with the unusual, but not fraught with any very great mystery. Now, however, the aspect had altered.

In the beginning David Carroll had before him the fact of the murder and three persons who confessed to the crime. In addition to that he had a notorious criminal whose coincidental presence at the scene of the shooting had fastened about him a web of circumstantial evidence sufficient to convict before the most open-minded jury.

But now it had changed. Proof, of an almost incontrovertible nature, had been furnished that neither Eunice Duval nor her fiancé had killed Hamilton; the bullet

from the revolver which Eunice had used had been located at a point where it could not have gone had either Badger or Hartigan fired it. It was fairly well settled that Vincent Harrelson had not fired. And Badger's shot had been accounted for as the one which had wounded Hartigan.

There was the matter of the six seconds of darkness, already explained by Hartigan's perfectly plausible confession that he had extinguished the lights to facilitate his escape and turned them on again after being shot so as to avoid detection in his sanctuary behind the screen. It had also been pretty well proven that three shots were fired; Badger's and Eunice's in the first few seconds of darkness, neither shot of which struck Hamilton, and the fatal shot, which was fired immediately after the lights went on.

By a simple process of deduction, that shot must have been fired by Hartigan; yet, if it were true that Badger's bullet

had found its mark in Hartigan's arm, the burglar's contention that he had not fired at all must be believed. His wrist was shattered by the bullet, and firing a revolver with that hand would have been out of the question, and investigation had fairly well proven that Hartigan was not capable of shooting with his left hand.

On the face of the evidence it seemed patent that Hartigan must be the guilty man, yet Carroll entertained grave doubts. He wanted to know more about the yegg whom Donaldson had addressed so familiarly as "Lefty," and there was still the butler to be accounted for. Besides, the maid had insisted stubbornly that in spite of her hysteria she had noticed that the sound of the final shot was clearer and more distinct than its predecessors—she immediately had asserted that it must have come from the garden.

They had left the maid upstairs in the care of Mrs. Faber, and of Maggie, the

cook. They assembled in the living room, Carroll and two of his men—the third having Hartigan in a chair on the veranda; Eunice and Vincent Harrelson; Police Commissioner Hall and Denson, the lawyer. And last, but undeniably not least, was Barrett Rollins, chief of the city's plain-clothes detective force.

Rollins was seated near the door through which Hamilton and young Vincent had struggled just before the former was killed. His straight-legged chair was tilted back against the wall, his broganed feet battered viciously against the slender legs, a rank pipe was clenched firmly between his none-too-even teeth—unlighted. His clothes, although very quiet and immaculately pressed, gave a subtle impression of untidiness—it may have been the narrow collar or the crooked set of his tie; but, whatever it was, the professional detective seemed out of place in the picture.

Furthermore, he was nervous and

fidgety, and that despite the fact that he was making a visible effort to keep himself under control. Hall, glancing at him not unkindly—for he admired the man's indomitable will and unflinching courage even while he detested him personally—imagined that he was still chafing at the bit, disgusted with Carroll's elevation to a position above him on the present case.

And, yet, Hall was glad now that he had summoned Carroll's aid. If he had done nothing else, Carroll had at least proved that the three original confessors—two of whom really believed their guilt—had not killed Hamilton. He had not done it with any display of mental pyrotechnics, with any pussy-footing around with an eye glued to a magnifying glass; yet he had done it. His methods had been simple to the point of being ludicrous—as he himself had explained, he had simply set out to marshal all facts and separate the relevant from the irrelevant, then

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to weigh the pros and cons of the former in the balance.

Rollins, Hall fancied, would have done nothing of the kind. From the moment Rollins had appeared at headquarters close on to midnight of the previous day, he had stubbornly—almost too stubbornly—maintained that Red Hartigan was the murderer.

There was sound reasoning behind his contention; no doubt about that, for in the first place Rollins knew nothing about Frederick Badger. Hall wondered idly why Carroll had kept all knowledge of Badger from Rollins. He knew that Carroll did nothing without a motive, but what particular object that move could have in view he was unable to understand. That it had one he did not doubt; but what?

A half dozen times since then the natural antagonism between the polished, placid Carroll and the brusque, almost bru-

tal Rollins had flared to the point of physical clash. The men seemed to be going to opposite extremes in the matter; Rollins eager to drop the case, Carroll just as determined to stick to it until every little detail was known to him. Carroll's was the best method theoretically; Rollins' was more conducive to speed. And now that the only remaining suspect was a professional burglar, Hall felt quite willing that the man should take his chances before a jury of twelve of his peers.

At that, Hall could not understand the part the butler had played in the tragedy. The man had been a new one in Hamilton's employ, true; but Hall knew the dead man well enough to realize that he would have employed no male domestic on the strength of anything but the very best of references. It was inconceivable that the man was what circumstances indicated.

The facts of the burglary were plain enough; the butler helping Hartigan and

the man called Lefty on the inside of the house, while a fourth kept watch outside. Not by any means an original plan of procedure, yet one which, in view of what had transpired, complicated things considerably.

There was, for instance, the matter of Hartigan's revolver, from which one bullet had been fired. Hartigan had stubbornly maintained that he had no revolver, although his contention in itself was subject to a hundred-per-cent discount in view of the fact that such a statement, if believed, would automatically absolve him. But there was the gun—and in contravention of the damning fact and in support of Hartigan's statement there was the casual story of the maid recounting the conversation between the butler and Lefty regarding Hartigan's revolver; the latter's contention that Hartigan did carry a gun and the former's that he had searched him and was positive that he did not.

Summed up, three of the original principals in the case had been cleared absolutely; the fourth had developed mitigating evidence. And the question of who actually killed Hamilton was apparently farther from solution than it had been a half hour after the crime was committed.

It was at this juncture, when matters had apparently reached an impasse, that the telephone on the centre table jangled impatiently. Carroll rose to answer it. The forelegs of Rollins' chair came down slowly to the floor.

"Hello, hello! Yes, this is Mr. Carroll. Oh, that you, Donaldson?"

"Yes, indeed."

Rollins' eyes popped open. Hall and Denson rose abruptly and stood rigidly by their chairs. Donaldson! Donaldson, the butler! Asking for and speaking to Carroll! And Carroll apparently not at all surprised. Carroll's voice went on smoothly:

“Good! . . . That’s fine . . . Yes, at Hamilton’s house. . . . Come on down, won’t you? . . . Yes. . . . Good-bye?”

He placed the receiver gently on the hook and turned smilingly to face the others; the group whose blank faces and eyes gave evidence to the surprise they felt. A dull flush had mounted to Rollins’ forehead—it was as though he had been tricked, and he was angry. It was Rollins who spoke:

“Who was that on the phone then, Mr. Carroll?”

“Just Donaldson,” came the quiet answer. “I had been waiting for that call.”

Rollins leaned forward tensely.

“You had been waitin’ for *Donaldson* to call *you*?”

“Why, yes! What’s wrong about that?”

Rollins produced a large handkerchief, lavender-bordered, and mopped his forehead.

“What th’ hell does it all mean?” he asked peculiarly. “I don’t seem to git it.”

“Nor I,” chimed in Denson.

“Nor do I, Mr. Carroll,” said Hall. “What is it?”

“Very simple,” came the placid answer. “*Donaldson is one of the best detectives on my personal staff!*”

A sudden blank silence fell upon them. Rollins rose abruptly and walked to the window.

“You didn’t tell us,” accused Denson. Hall nodded.

“No-o,” said Carroll slowly; “there wasn’t any use. You see, I knew who Donaldson was, and I wasn’t at all worried over his complicity in the affair. So now that we’re all satisfied there’s——”

Rollins whirled and confronted Carroll with a return of his old belligerence.

“We’re not!” he snapped furiously. “Not by a dam’ sight! S’pose you are in charge of this case—does that give you any

right to make a fool outa me? Huh! Does it?"

Carroll controlled himself beautifully; almost too well.

"Here, here! What's all the excitement, Rollins?"

"Excitement enough. Whatcha think I am, a schoolboy? A correspondence-school detective? Huh? I ask you that? Well, if you want to know what I think of it—I think you an' your whole messy crowd can go plumb to the devil! Get that?"

"Wait a minute, Rollins; wa-a-a-it a minute! You're flying off the handle too quick."

"It's none of your business. You've had me trotting around with you like a monkey on the end of a string. You ain't told me a thing more than you've told any one else. You got me to sit up here an' make a fool of myself when all the time you knew Donaldson was in on the know

it. I'm finished! Done! That goes
she lays, Mr. Hall. You can take my
gnation an' make this tea-hound, five-
lock-in-the-afternoon detective head of
ir plain-clothes force. Bull! A swell
you'd make, Carroll! Why, by
d——"

But Carroll refused to lose his temper.
stead, his voice took on an almost plead-
note, and he laid his hand lightly on
llins' arm.

'Come, come now, old man!'" he said in
heedling tone. "That's no way to lose
ir head. What if I did keep you in the
k about being wise to Donaldson?
n't you see that I was only doing it to
e my own face in case he flivvered?
st suppose I went spouting around that
naldson was on my staff, and suppose
had double-crossed me and really made
et-away; I'd have been a sweet laugh-
stock then, Rollins. Can't you see
t? Sure you can—you know you'd

play the game the same way. I'll bet you know something about this very case that I don't know; hey?"

Rollins subsided suddenly, apparently mollified.

"Whatdaya mean," he growled surlily, "I know somethin' about this case?"

"Haven't you run across some little clue or something that you've kept to yourself; just some little tiny thing that you're trying to run down on your own so as to show me up?"

Rollins was plainly at a loss for an interpretation of Carroll's meaning.

"Come now," pursued the smaller man, "isn't that a fact?"

Rollins' big hands went to his hips, and he stared into Carroll's eyes aggressively.

"What in th' hell you drivin' at?" he questioned furiously. "Tryin' to make a monkey out of me again? 'Cause if you are——"

"No, indeed; believe me, Rollins, noth-

ing is farther from my mind. If I've done you an injustice, I'm sorry. Only, please, for the sake of the audience, let us not have any more of this eternal bickering and recrimination. It don't get either of us anywhere, and one of these times you'll go too far."

"I don't give a——"

"Whoa! Careful, Rollins; no use straining good nature to the breaking point. Now let's be sensible."

Rollins subsided as suddenly as he had flared up. He seated himself again and tilted his chair back against the wall with assumed nonchalance.

"If that's the case," he said, "s'pose you tell us how Donaldson happens to be your detective."

"No-o, I'm afraid I can't do that."

"You mean you won't!"

"Please don't translate my meanings to fit your beliefs. I said that I can't and I mean *can't!* My original business, the

thing which resulted in Donaldson's employment in this household as butler, had nothing whatever to do with this murder case. And I don't care to discuss the business of the man who has paid me a retainer. That's all." The suspicion of a twinkle flashed in Carroll's eyes as he added briefly: "That must appeal to your sense of ethics."

Rollins shook his head.

"Sounds like foolishness to me," he said. "An' if you're goin' to keep things to yourself I don't see what you want me hangin' around for." He started to rise, but Carroll motioned him back.

"No, I'd rather have you stay. Just as I've told those gentlemen—there's always more than an even chance that my mind will get on the wrong track and that I'll make a mistake somewhere—and just as two heads are better than one, four are better than three."

“Especially,” snapped Rollins, “where one of ’em’s solid ivory.”

Carroll grinned amiably.

“Yes, especially where one is of solid ivory.”

The front-door bell rang twice—then once. Carroll strode toward the hall door.

“Donaldson,” he flung back; “I’m sure that’s who it is.”

He disappeared into the hall, and within three minutes was back, followed by Donaldson, unkempt, his face showing the lack of sleep the previous night, his clothes streaked with dirt. Nor was Donaldson alone. On the ex-butler’s right wrist was one of a pair of handcuffs. The other handcuff was tightly clamped on the wrist of the slender, furtive-eyed man with him. The two handcuffs were connected by a competent-looking chain.

As for the stranger, he, too, was dishevelled; it was quite evident that his capture

had not been unresisted. He glanced apprehensively about the room, and finally his eyes rested on Barrett Rollins. He sighed and chewed nervously at his under lip.

"Who is that with you, Donaldson?" questioned Carroll innocently.

The butler smiled slightly and waved his free hand toward the captive.

"Mister Lefty Scammon, alias Shifty, alias a half dozen other things."

"And why did you make him prisoner?"

Donaldson smiled the smile of supreme triumph. It was his big moment.

"Lefty Scammon," he said oracularly, "*is the man who murdered Mr. Hamilton!*"

CHAPTER XV.

THE rapid-fire development of the unusual in the last fourteen hours had brought Police Commissioner Hall to the belief that surprise had lost its edge for him; he had rather fancied that he could no longer be stirred from his mental equilibrium by any new developments in the Hamilton case.

The announcement that the missing butler was a detective on Carroll's private and very efficient staff had merely ruffled his complacency. But Donaldson's calm and triumphant accusation that Lefty Scammon was Hamilton's murderer completely destroyed his aplomb. He sank weakly into a chair.

Nor was he more surprised than the others in the room—except perhaps Carroll. But, then, thought the commis-

sioner, facial control was a vital part of Carroll's stock in trade, and the chances were——

Rollins had tensed rigidly. His eyes bored into those of the new suspect. Hall shifted his gaze from Rollins' face to that of Lefty Scammon, and what he read there jarred him again.

For, beyond a question of doubt, Lefty Scammon was stunned with surprise. For perhaps fifteen seconds he tried to speak, opening his mouth and closing it again without uttering a sound other than a choked gurgle. Carroll strolled to the big doors and nodded briefly to Roberts, who entered the room, followed by the wounded Hartigan. The tableau would have been ludicrous were it not so fraught with melodramatic intensity.

And finally Scammon regained his speech.

"Wha-whadaya think of that!" he gasped. "Oh, my Gawd, whadaya think

of that! Red—they got *me* for killin' Hamilton!"

Hartigan's poise was perfect. He merely shrugged.

"That's a habit of theirs, Lefty. They got me for the same thing."

The dry humour of his remark, and the fact that it was timed to break into a silence so tense as to be nerve-wrecking, brought involuntary smiles to the faces of all in the room. The terribly grim humour of the situation could not fail to appear to overwrought nerves. It was Rollins who broke in, roughly as usual.

"A lot o' rot!" he raved. "Hartigan is the man who done it, an' that's all there is to it!"

Donaldson turned to Carroll.

"What's that he's sayin', chief? Does he really think Hartigan done it?"

"So he says," returned Carroll. "What do *you* think about it?"

"He's wrong," came back Donaldson

respectfully. "Y'see, chief, I searched Hartigan before the burglary, an' he didn't pack a rod at all."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Positive."

"How so?"

"I searched him. Y'see, I was in on it, and I wasn't runnin' any chances of rough stuff—which is just what happened."

"The third man concerned; who was he?"

"A yegg they call Pal Conover; yeller as a dog. He beat it when the thing started—scared stiff. He didn't have a gun, either. This here bird," indicating Lefty Scammon, "was the only one who had one."

Scammon whirled on it.

"That's a damned lie, Donaldson, an' you know it. Didja find a gun on me?"

"Not after I caught you, no," returned the ex-butler. "But it wasn't so hard to chuck it away."

"Yeh!" gibed Scammon, with forced bravado. "Go look for it. Y'd know it in a minute. See if you find it; there ain't no chancst of y'r missing it—one of the plates on the butt is cracked in an L shape. G'wan look for it; see if y' find it."

"Which means," interjected Carroll quietly, "that he is quite sure you will not find it there."

"Ain't it pretty rough jackin' this man up for murder," butted in Rollins, "just because he had a gat in his pocket?"

"No-o," negatived Carroll, "I can't see that it is. He had the motive for shooting and he had the weapon. What more is needed?"

"Proof!" snarled Rollins. "Just proof, that's all. An' that's th' one thing you don't seem to pay no attention to."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not. Suppose," turning to Donaldson, "you tell us just what occurred, from first to last."

"Everything?"

“The whole business from the time you first came here to work for Mr. Hamilton.”

Donaldson seemed not at all averse to holding the centre of the stage. He started deliberately and talked clearly and distinctly throughout his story.

“About a month ago, the chief—Mr. Carroll here—sends for me; I’m working in Chicago then. He tells me that he’s been retained by this man Hamilton to gather evidence for some graft investigation directed against the police force. I’m to work in Mr. Hamilton’s house as butler, him, of course, knowing that I’m a ’tec.

“I take the job, my work bein’ to watch an’ see that there ain’t no attempt made to get away with a bunch of documentary evidence that Mr. Hamilton has in his safe; evidence that ain’t any too sweet readin’ to certain eyes. It seemin’ as though th’ parties goin’ to be caught in th’ dragnet was wise that it was kept in this house.

“Things run along pretty easy for a while, an’ then I meets up with this guy Scammon. Right away I spot him for a crook, an’ I know he must have somethin’ up his sleeve or he wouldn’t be hangin’ around an’ buyin’ me drinks whenever we got alone together.

“There ain’t no special use in goin’ into details of how I played this fish for a sucker—but the long and short of it is that in about two weeks I had him thinking I was the charter member of the independent order of yeggs.

“Then his proposition comes; he don’t tell me nothin’ about no graft investigation, but he says that he’s in with the police—stool pigeon, see?—an’ that certain parties what is goin’ to be caught wrong in this graft thing has framed up a burglary.

“Of course I knew what they was after. That there evidence Mr. Hamilton had was about all the written dope there

was. Once let the right ones get their hands on it an' burn it up, Hamilton an' his Civic Reform League would have made fools outa themselves tryin' to prove anything.

"So Scammon tells me that this here yegg job is under the protection of the police department; that him an' Red Hargigan an' this here yeller dog, Pal Conover, is goin' to work; me helpin' from the inside. That's to make it look real, see? Scammon says me an' th' other two can divide the boodle, all he wants is some papers outa th' safe.

"Well, sir, a blind man could of seen through that game. It was too easy. An' I wasn't tellin' it to Mr. Hamilton, either; me figurin'—whether I was right or wrong—that he might spill the beans when the time come.

"I framed the night myself; Maggie was out, an' I thought Ethel was goin' out, too. She had asked for the evenin' off, an' I

thought she'd got it. So I tol' 'em to come early, which they done; they was in the house when that young gentleman there come in.

"Things worked fine; Red an' me bundled up all the joolry and silver, an' I got him down in the dinin' room. Then I went back upstairs to the attic, where I found that Ethel hadn't gone out at all, but that Lefty had run foul of her, trussed her up, an' stuck her in the attic—which reminds me I forgot all about her."

"We found her," reassured Carroll. "She's all right."

"Good! I'll bet the poor kid was scared stiff. Anyway, Lefty had took his papers outa th' safe in Mr. Hamilton's bedroom—one of these here cheese boxes that's an insult to a good cracksman—an' he was satisfied. So I sends him downstairs with instructions to vamose outa th' front door. waitin' in th' garden for Hartigan.

"I goes down, an' Red is still in th' din-

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in' room. He says he thinks he hears some one in the living room, so I walk in there. It's empty, Mr. Hamilton an' Mr. Harrelson bein' in the library. So I come back an' tip Red off he can slip behind the screen in the livin' room an' out through the window, which was half open—which same he says he'll do, an' I go upstairs to Mr. Hamilton's room to put th' papers back in th' safe."

"What papers?" The question came from Commissioner Hall.

"Th' evidence Mr. Hamilton had."

"But I thought you said——"

"Oh! That bunch that Lefty Scammon had? Gee, I ain't that soft! The stuff he got wasn't nothin' but copies. We still got the originals safe an' sound!"

"O-o-oh!" A sigh of surprise went up from somewhere in the room. Donaldson chuckled softly and continued:

"That was where my job ended. I had all the dope on the men who were in the

robbery, an' they didn't have nothin' but some false documents that didn't do 'em no good, an' I had the name of the man who was behind the thing—it wasn't such a hard job gettin' that info, either. Even a crook'll talk too much if you go at him right."

He paused for a second.

"But right there was where things started goin' wrong. All of a sudden there was two shots from the living room an' a sort of a crash. I made a jump for the winder, an' while I looked I seen lights come on downstairs where everything had been dark, an' just then some one shot again from behind that bush yonder—about fifty feet away from the livin'-room door that opens onto the veranda.

"An' then I seen a man runnin' away—just as fast as he could travel.

"An', gentlemen, I'm here to swear by everythin' in the world that th' man who jumped up an' beat it after firin' that shot

was this here Mister Lefty Scammon! I could see him *that* plain in th' moonlight!"

There followed five seconds of stunned silence. Carroll broke in with his quiet, soothing voice:

"And after that?"

"Well, sir, I plumb forgot all about Ethel bein' tied up in the attic. I forgot everything except that somethin' rotten had happened. Who Lefty had shot or why I didn't know. I beat it down th' front steps, through the library, an' outa the window to the veranda. I scooted down past the door an' looked in—there was Miss Eunice an' Mr. Harrelson bendin' over Mr. Hamilton. I knew, no matter how bad he was hurt, they'd see he got the best of attention. My job was clear—it was up to me to catch Scammon, an' I lit a rag after him.

"An', believe me, this bird is some elusive kid! An' when I got him he put up a fair good scrap for such a little fellow.

But here he is—an' here"—he slipped deft fingers into Scammon's coat pocket and produced a packet—"is the batch of fake evidence that I planted for him to steal."

Carroll approached Lefty Scammon.

"What have you to say for yourself, Scammon?"

"Nothin'."

"You realize we've got you in a tight place?"

"I've been in tight places before."

"Now don't be a fool, Lefty. Facing a burglary charge and going into the dock with a murder indictment and this sort of evidence against you are different things; you're liable to swing." The man looked up, the light of a cornered rat in his eyes.

"I tol' you I didn't have nothin' to say, an' that goes!" he snapped viciously. "You can take your third-degree stuff to hell with you!"

But Carroll refused to be ruffled. He turned to Rollins.

"We've got him, haven't we, Rollins?"

The detective shrugged.

"He says he didn't do it."

"But we've got the goods on him; you'll admit yourself that he hasn't got a chance, won't you?" Rollins' face flamed.

"I'm admittin' nothin'. This is your case; go handle it your own way."

"I'm afraid it's the chair for you, Scammon," said Carroll sadly. "We've got you where we want you, and we're going to make you pay. Rollins, you see, don't want to say anything officially because he has resigned from the police force——"

"What's that?" gasped Scammon.

"It's a lie!" flashed Rollins.

Carroll turned quietly to Hall.

"This is the police commissioner, Scammon. Mr. Hall, didn't Rollins resign his position on the force a few minutes back?"

Hall took his cue cleverly.

"Yes," he answered promptly, "and his resignation is accepted."

Rollins would have interrupted, but Carroll ordered him back. Scammon turned large, hunted eyes to him.

"You're tellin' me th' truth?" he pleaded. "Honest t' Gawd you ain't lyin'?"

"What I've said is on the level, Scammon——"

"It's a dirty lie!" from Rollins.

"It's the truth!" verified Hall.

"Then," said Scammon simply, "there ain't a chancst for me, an' I'm not gonna be th' goat. S'long's Rollins was th' head of the plain-clothes squad I was ready to take chances, but now there's——"

This time Rollins spoke. He shook his fist in the ratlike face of the little man.

"You dam' little runt——"

"You can't scare me, Rollins," he said quietly. He turned to Carroll. "*Rollins, here, is the man who murdered Hamilton!*"

CHAPTER XVI

IN the face of a crisis a man will exhibit courage or cowardice. And Barrett Rollins, accused at the eleventh hour of a crime with which he had apparently had no connection, played his rôle well.

He did not bluster; he did not shrink. Instead, he seemed suddenly cool—although one might have noticed an occasional biting of his lips, a twitching of his huge, muscular hands, a furtive glance from the corners of his little eyes.

For Rollins was cornered. The chain of evidence woven so cleverly by circumstance around the other principals in the drama had suddenly wound itself about him. With Scammon's accusation, loose ends of the story seemed to meet—or al-

most so. But Rollins played his hand gamely. For the first time in the course of the case he won the sincere admiration of Commissioner Hall and of Denson, the lawyer.

So cool was he, in fact, so seemingly contemptuous of Scammon's charge, that Hall could not bring himself to believe that the man was guilty. The idea was too preposterous; too far-fetched. And yet Scammon's voice had carried conviction of knowledge, Scammon's whole demeanour had implied verity. And instead of allowing himself to lose control Rollins merely shrugged.

"Damned nonsense!" was all he said.

Carroll had not changed his expression.

"For your sake, Rollins, I hope so."

"I didn't ask for any soft stuff from you, Carroll. An ass of your type would most likely believe this crook's story."

"Ye-e-s, he most likely would." Carroll turned back to Scammon. "Now

listen here, Lefty—if you can prove the charge you’ve just made you’re in a fair way to get clear of this murder charge. Burglary you’re in for, whether or no. Take my advice and come clean with the whole story. Are you willing?”

The expression of the little fellow was almost pitiful.

“Sure I am, sir. As I said, sir, I wasn’t squealin’ on no pal—s’long’s Rollins was on the force I knowed he’d see me safe through some way. But maybe I’d better tell all of it like it happened.”

“D’yuh mean,” growled Rollins interrogatively, “that you’re gonna sit there an’ listen to his drivel?”

“Yes, I guess we’d better. They’ve all had a chance to talk except Scammon. Go ahead, Lefty.”

The little man passed a nervous hand across his lips.

“All th’ beginnin’ of my story goes pretty well with what this fly cop,” indi-

cating Donaldson, "said. Only one thing is different; th' man who came to me with the proposition was Chief Rollins yonder. He said that Hamilton had some papers in his safe which he wanted. He seemed to know all about what they were an' all.

"He said he wanted me to get a coupla good yeggs an' work the house. Wanted to make it look like th' real thing, see; so's when they found th' stuff was gone they'd think it had just been took accidentallike wit' th' rest of th' swag. Th' thing looked pretty easy, 'specially after I managed to strike up an acquaintance wit' this here guy. I t'ought he was th' butler, see? Well, he comes across elegant. I was a boob for not knowin' he was too easy, but how was I to know they was lookin' for just this kind of a move?

"Him an' Red Hartigan an' Pal Conover was to divide what they got. I was to get th' things Rollins wanted an' meet

him out yonder by that bush, y' see about fifty or sixty feet beyond th' porch door. Of course, havin' th' butler fixed, it looked easy. An' there wasn't no chancst for me to do Rollins dirt, 'cause he had th' goods on me for another little job of mine, an' he said he'd send me up if I didn't come across fair an' square. Oh, I ain't even squealin' on him now because I want to—th' chief has always treated me right; but murder I won't face for no man.

"All what th' butler—Donaldson—says about th' robbery happened just like that. I got down t' th' front hall an' out into th' garden. It was pretty bright, an' I didn't have no trouble spottin' th' bush Rollins was hid behind, see? I had th' packet in me pocket—an' I had my gun out."

"You had your revolver in your hand?"

"Sure, a .38 special wit' one of the butt plates busted. I had took it out when I got t' th' bottom of th' front stairs, because there was two fellers quarrellin' hell bent

for 'lection in th' room yonder, an' I wasn't takin' no chances if they should of happened to run up on me—y'see, they don't usually ask no questions of burglars—they shoot.

"Anyway, I creeps along slow an' easy, gun out an' th' papers in my pocket, until I gets t' th' bush. There was Rollins lyin' there comfy 'an' easy. As I get there he grabs me.

" 'Duck, you dam' fool, *duck!*' he says. 'Lookit there!'

"He points to th' winder of this here room, which we could see real plain, them there big, double doors bein' opened. Rollins was all excited.

" 'They'll make it easy f'r me!' he says. 'Lookit!'

"A big man an' a little man was scrap-pin', an' then, all of a suddint, th' little feller tears loose an' makes a break for th' table. He yanks out a gun, an' before he can shoot th' big feller grabs him.

“I hope he gets him!” Rollins was sayin’ over an’ over again. ‘I hope he kills that—Hamilton!’

“Just then th’ lights went out—flooie! just like that. There was two shots, or one, I ain’t sure which. Then th’ lights flashed on in about five or six seconds. There they was, standin’ up kinder funny, an’ th’ young lady yonder had the revolver in her hand. This geezer Hamilton was starin’ around like he didn’t know what to make of it, an’ Rollins lets out a line of cuss words that’d of burned if you’d of touched a match to ’em.

“‘Missed him,’ he says, fiercelike. ‘By God, I’ll get him myself!’

“An’ with that he outs with his gat an’ takes one crack at Hamilton. An’, b’lieve me, mister, when Rollins shoots he don’t usually miss—not often. Take it from me, it wasn’t no cold-blooded murder, he was that excited an’ all. Anyway, w’en I seen Hamilton fallin’, b’lieve me, I didn’t think

of nothin' but makin' a get-away! I drops me gun, hops to me feet, an' makes tracks for River Street, an' I guess that's when this here Donaldson seen me, because he come after me right away. An' that's th' truth."

Rollins filled his pipe from a well-used sack, tamped it down with meticulous care, lighted it carefully, and puffed deeply two or three times. When he spoke his voice was quiet and inquiring rather than bitter.

"It looks like story-tellin' is th' most pop'lar indoor sport around here," he started slowly, choosing his words with evident care. "So it's up to me to have my innin's an' to explain how I know Har-tigan done it, and why I've been insisting on that all along.

"To go back a little ways, y'll probably remember this mornin' when Carroll here says that maybe I know somethin' about th' case I ain't tellin'? Yeh? Well, he

if you shot from behind that bush, have struck in the ceiling yonder where Miss Duval's bullet hit. No, you didn't shoot Hartigan, Rollins."

"I swear I did—that's the truth if I ever told it, Carroll. An' after I shot I beat it right down to headquarters, an' they just got th' news in there an' sent me up here wit' Hawkins an' Cartwright. What's wrong wit' that story?"

"As a story it's a dandy, Rollins," returned Carroll calmly. "I congratulate you on it. But as the truth—nothing doing!"

"I s'pose y' can prove it ain't th' truth, huh?"

"Yes, certainly I can."

"Do it, then!"

"All right—how about this? Perhaps you did not know that we have down at the police station the man who shot Red Hartigan! His name is Frederick Badger."

Rollins paled, but even then he did not lose his poise.

"I can't be bluffed," he said belligerently. "Y' think I'd b'lieve that?"

"No, but a jury probably will. You see, this man Badger is a monomaniac, a half-wit. He went there to kill Mr. Hamilton and actually tried to do it. Hartigan switched off the lights and Badger fired from his place by the window—screened from you, by the way, by the veranda screen which had been let down during the afternoon. His bullet went in through the window, struck Hartigan on the wrist, and went on through the screen, making the hole that you claim Hartigan made with his bullet. And that's the little trump I've been holding up my sleeve—I wanted to see just how you'd work your end of the case if you didn't know about Badger.

"Remember this, Rollins. I had been looking for this burglary of yours. My

plan was to let it go off just like you planned, and then make the whole thing public. The killing of Mr. Hamilton changed those plans considerably. You've always had a reputation for being hot-headed; a dozen times in your police career you've been on the carpet for shooting men without cause. Scammon's story sounds true; there's just one more link necessary—would you mind letting me see your revolver?"

"Th' hell with you! I'll let you see nothing!"

"Don't be foolish, Rollins. It will take us about three seconds to get it from you forcibly. Better fork over."

Rollins was trapped and he knew it. With a very bad grace, he handed his revolver, butt first, to Carroll, and Carroll exhibited it to the others. It was a .38 special with a broken butt plate.

"Your revolver, Scammon?"

The burglar nodded.

“Yes—I’d know it in a million.”

“Good! And now, gentlemen, can’t you see what happened? Miss Duval’s bullet lodged in the ceiling, Mr. Harrelson never fired, Badger shot Hartigan, and Hartigan never had a gun. Rollins, in a fit of fury—one of the kind for which he is notorious, and realizing that the crime could be fastened on any one of three others, killed Hamilton.

“Then when Rollins was sent on the case he planted his own revolver, from which one shot had been fired, on Hartigan. A great case against the man, don’t you see. He kept the revolver Lefty Scammon had dropped. It’s really rather simple after you’ve got the facts before you—although I admit freely, Rollins, that you had me completely fooled. I started out with the idea that you had a hand in it, and I lost that idea. It would have stayed lost, perhaps, if you had not insisted so stubbornly that Hartigan was

the man who did it when I knew all the time that Hartigan's story must be true. And so, gentlemen," turning to the others, "I think that about ends our day's work. If you don't mind, Rollins, we'll slip the bracelets on you."

Rollins held out his hands mildly and the handcuffs were slipped over his wrists.

"Do you wish to confess?" questioned Carroll in his habitual kindly voice.

Rollins smiled with grim humour.

"I've been in this business too long to confess to anything," he answered. "What you got against me you gotta prove!"

"I guess we'll do that all right enough, Rollins. And now—let's call it a day. There are a few entries to be made on the blotter at headquarters."

Sergeant Larry O'Brien turned on his cot, waked, yawned, and stretched himself luxuriously. His eye lighted on the im-

mense figure of Patrolman Rafferty on the next cot.

“There’s wan thing I’m afther hopin’,” said Sergeant Larry O’Brien, “an’ that is that there’s somethin’ doin’ today. Things around here lately have been too slow. By the way, got an evenin’ paper?”

Rafferty smiled. “Here’s an extry.”

The flaring headlines burned themselves into the brain of Sergeant O’Brien, but he refused to be budged from his professional stolidity.

“Never did like that guy Rollins, anyway,” he said. “An’ I’m right glad neither of them two kids is gonna be hanged. They’re better off married!”

THE END

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